ISBN 0 7278 4909 3 US$22.00

ESSIE SUMMERS

CALEB'S KINGDOM

Up until now, journalist Greta Mountford had led a roving life, but as her June wedding to Martin draws near, it seems she is going to realise her dream, and finally put down her roots.

However, whilst researching an assignment, Greta discovers that Martin has been having an affair. Greta resolves to break their engagement, but before she can do so, fate steps in: Martin is killed on the way home.

Faced with this double grief, Greta feels she must get away and have a complete change. Through a New Zealand connection, she hears that a sheep and deer farm in New Zealand's Lake District needs help while its owner, Caleb Armstrong, is away on an agricultural mission in Europe.

The change of scene and spectacular surroundings work their magic on Greta. But the return of Caleb Armstrong heralds the end of her new-found peace of mind. For his presence – and her attraction to him – is far too disturbing for comfort...

CALEB'S KINGDOM

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Essie Summers

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Author's Note

The background for this book is one of my favourites, Lake Wakatipu. So we were delighted some years ago, when my husband, the Rev. Bill Flett, who had taken early retirement because of a health problem, was asked to supply the St Andrew's Presbyterian pulpit for a couple of months, during a vacancy. They would put some furniture in the manse for us. Its upstairs windows gave a glorious view of Queenstown and every night I rushed up to see the sunset staining the peaks of the Remarkables, a coppery rose above the sapphire lake. One memorable feature was going up to Glenorchy, at the Head-of-the-Lake once a month to take a service up there, a small community only reached by water, for the first hundred or so years of colonisation. We stayed three days and visited all homesteads there, irrespective of denomination.

The trouble was the congregation took Bill to their hearts and sounded me out on whether Bill would take a call. Regretfully I had to say his doctor had said that on no account was it to develop into a full-time ministry, so though we stayed from the autumn, at Eastertime, till the end of the ski season, we told them we must go back to Dunedin. Some years later I took a break from writing novels in order to keep a promise made to my father to someday record (for family only) the wonderful stories he and Mother had handed down. When I got back as far as 1333 in the family tree, I decided that was enough and have now commenced writing novels again.

For the sake of the many readers from overseas who come to New Zealand to see these scenes for themselves, I would like to say that though the setting is authentic, the homesteads and the big sheep-stations I write of, have, of course, to be

fictional. In this book, a few miles out of Queenstown on the Glenorchy road, just before Mt Creighton station, you can imagine the road through the Wilderness to Caleb's Kingdom. And Ludwigtown was patterned on Arrowtown, a delectably historic spot, with a fictional lake Moana-Kotare, thrown in for good measure. So here is my second novel for Severn House.

Chapter One

Heathrow airport and Greta was kissing her parents goodbye. "I know it's useless to tell you two not to worry, but you'll probably be surprised when I return in a year or two to find your old, fun-loving daughter again. The new experiences that lie ahead of me in New Zealand will overlay the happenings behind me, I'm sure. It's only by getting away from this mad newspaper world that I'll be able to recover. What freedom it will be to not have to suspect that every whisper has your name in it. A straightforward bereavement I could have taken but to have found Martin out so soon before was devastating. And the circumstances caused so much speculation. I know some of it has been sympathetic, but there's also been some relish. I mean for the dramatic story it certainly was.

"I've overheard some of it, like: 'Will it change her? Will she emerge hard-boiled like the rest of us?' Even: 'Well, she won't be so starry-eyed now. She'll lose her rose-coloured spectacles.' Well, I'm damned if I will! But I'll do it better away from here. Let them speculate . . . I'll take my own line, I'll still believe in people. I've seen enough of both sides of life with you two in some of the tougher spots in the globe, to know that integrity and love *can* flourish side by side with malice and untrustworthiness."

She stopped, laughed, gave them another hug, "Oh, listen to me, saying all I've wanted to say for the last three months and daren't. It's the trauma of saying goodbye, though I ought to be used to partings. Thank you for being what you've been to me since it happened and in particular for not being bitter about Martin."

Her father put his arms about her, said, "That's my girl,"

and her mother said, "I feel filled with gladness that it's Theresa you're going to. She may be a generation away from you, somewhere between ours and yours, but she knew enough anguish the time she spent with Evelina in Salzburg, before the world came right for her again, to understand. Differing circumstances, I grant, but it took a lot of endurance."

Another brief kiss, and a muttered: "Thanks especially for paying the extra for business class . . . so much less crowded," and she was through the barrier into the departure lounge, leaving two pairs of over-bright eyes behind her.

Hugh Mountford said: "Damn and blast Martin! There, I've relieved my feelings. I couldn't let go before, I'd have said too much."

Jill Mountford said fervently, reaching for her husband's hand, "Thank you, Hugh, you've relieved my feelings too. What a relief. Now we can be perfectly natural again. And Hugh, don't forget, she's got grit. She's had to have it, some of the situations we've involved her in. It'll stand her in good stead now."

Half an hour later, comfortably settled in a window-seat, and thankful for the luxury and privacy of what could have been the width of another seat between her and the passenger on the aisle, but was instead a folding table, she had her first glimpse of the Atlantic below. Somewhow it marked for her the difference between her past and her future. This was an aquamarine rippled expanse, serene and apparently limitless. She looked at the clouds very high above and beyond, and saw fire edging them, not the silver lining you were told to expect, but the living fire of worlds beyond those clouds. A most unexpected tide of anticipation rose within her. To be able to feel like this again was amazing. A sign that rehabilitation lay ahead. By the time she would cross to the Pacific, over the great land mass of the Americas, it would be the sign of a new life, perhaps not untinged with the sorrows and disillusionments of yesterday, but with the hope of compensations yet undreamed-of.

Her seat companion proved to be ideal . . . busy with business papers and very glad he could have sole use of

that table-top between them. He also seemed grateful she didn't want to talk.

Inevitably her thoughts drifted to what had brought her to this. It had been a perfect day in spring. An unexpected assignment had taken her to Surrey, and when returning, a signpost made her realize she was near the village where Martin had so recently told her, there was a delightful cottage belonging to friends of his who had offered him the use of it for their June honeymoon. He had made it sound so ideal that she'd said idly, "How come you can describe it so well?"

He'd replied, "Oh, I've spent weekends there with them before I met you. They'd have met you by now but they've been months in Portugal at a branch of his business. They have a flat in London too. With your love of the old and quaint, you'll just love it. Though it's been modernized to the point of comfort."

So when it flashed up on the signpost she stopped, turned round, got off the beaten track and was enchanted with the whole setting. She had walked round the old-world garden, peering in at the windows seeing it was obviously untenanted at the moment, for the lovely old brass knocker had made enough noise to raise the dead.

She'd seen a woman in the house next door, leaned over the low stone wall, saying: "Excuse me, it so happens the owner of this cottage is lending it to us for our honeymoon this June. You don't happen to have the key, do you? If you do, I can show you identification. I'd no idea I was going to be near here but my paper sent me to write up the history of Roxby Hall for the coming celebrations. I'd love to look it over, see what we'll need."

"No, I haven't got it," the neighbour replied. "I don't know what arrangement the owner usually makes. Not that he lets it out often, it's too choice a property. But what a pity you'd not been here half an hour ago. There was a couple here this weekend. I've seen them here two or three times. A very striking-looking girl with the most beautiful coppery hair. When he called her Virginia I thought how she suited it. Just like a Virginia leaf in autumn. Nice and quiet they

were. You could live next-door to a holiday cottage given to noisy parties, but these two have come and gone very quietly each time. I wonder if your husband-to-be might know them. I mean if he knows the owner, they could be mutual friends. I don't know their surname, I'm afraid, but I heard her call him Martin. He was driving an MG."

Greta had felt as if every atom of feeling stilled within her. Oh, no! *It couldn't be*. No, no, no! Miraculously she managed not to let her shock show, said, "I'm afraid not. But I'll get my fiancé to bring me down before long. It's nice to know what to bring." She took a deep breath, said brightly, "How lovely your garden is looking. The sun on those violets is bringing out the perfume."

The woman nodded. "They multiply and multiply. I'll pick you a bunch of them. You said you worked for a newspaper so you probably don't have a garden?"

Greta had nodded, thankful to be looking down at the violets. "All we have is a balcony of pot-plants. My mother does miss a garden. She's almost always been able to create one wherever we've gone." She was finding it hard to swallow, longing to get away to marshal her thoughts, clinging to a desperate hope that this was not *her* Martin, not Virginia Lessington.

Greta had subdued a temptation to snatch the violets and run. The woman went on picking. Violets took so long . . . she managed, "My parents had to move round the world quite a bit, but where possible, she liked a lawn where we could play, though often we were with my father's parents in Northumberland. That's why we appreciate being with them now."

. . . The picking went on. "It's nice to hear. So few live at home these days."

Greta said desperately, "Well, they often have to be nearer their work. Look, that'll be enough. I'm sure you must be tired with all the bending."

"Oh, I'll just dash in and get a piece of paper to wrap them in. They've still got some dew on them, despite that sun."

"Oh, please don't bother. I'd better be on my way, that big black cloud is rolling towards the sun. We could get a

downpour any moment. I've got a newspaper in the car. I'll put them on that. Goodbye, and thank you so much." And she was away.

She drove on for a couple of miles, saw a widening of the tree-bordered road where she could stop safely, and drew in. She sat there, numbed. Could it be a coincidence? Such things were always being reported . . . people from Australia meeting most unexpectedly in a London street . . . long-separated family members being re-united through an odd quirk of timing, even cases of identity mix-ups. That must be it. A mix-up. Martin and Virginia weren't very common names but neither were they really rare. Then reality set in . . . Martin had known the owner, and for sure the Virginia they both worked with had glorious copper hair. It *had* been her long weekend. And although Martin wasn't on the reporting staff, but the accountancy, he *had* been away, auditing a branch office. But why, why? If he had suddenly found himself fascinated by Virginia, and wanted to marry her, Greta would have released him. Not for her a reluctant bridegroom. That meant that fidelity to one girl simply hadn't mattered to him. Perhaps never would.

Anger swept over her now as she drove. She'd tell him and tell Virginia she didn't want a husband like that. Unwelcome tears were blurring her vision and pouring down her cheeks. She realized she ought not to drive in this condition. Not fair to put other drivers at risk. The roads were narrow and twisting till one reached the main road. She pulled in again and mopped up.

All of a sudden she decided on her plan of action. Martin would reach his flat well ahead of her. Virginia might be with him still. And the first showdown was to be with Martin, and in privacy. She'd go home, ask him to call for her, go for a short drive . . . the shorter the better. Tell him she knew, say a few scathing words, give him back his hoop of diamonds. Hopeless to see him at his flat where anyone could call, or ring. It wouldn't take long.

At that moment there was a flash of lightning, then a roll of thunder, and the skies opened. This was the last straw. The journey would take longer. She switched the wipers on. They

cut half a dozen swathes, then stopped. Oh, damn and blast. It was the left one playing up again, not synchronizing. You had to get out, give it a few arcs manually, and all would be well. She'd be soaked.

She was. It was more difficult than before, with this wind tearing at her. It lifted her long fair hair right up, swirling it across her face, felt horrible. Well, she wouldn't have it like this much longer. That was Martin's preference. He'd liked long hair on brides, he'd said. She'd have it chopped off tomorrow. She drove on.

She turned a corner, taking due care, and here was a hold-up. A long line of cars, and every appearance of an accident, perhaps around the next corner. A broad figure appeared to be pulling traffic to a halt. Two cars ahead stopped, held a brief talk with this man, then in obedience to his gestures, turned back the way they had come. Greta stopped, put her head out, said, "Nothing serious, I hope?"

He braced himself against a vicious gust of wind, said, "Afraid so. A bit on from here . . . but I've been asked to divert all traffic coming this way or there'll be a huge pile-up. There have already been two minor prangs . . . just damage to car-bodies, thank goodness, not like—"

"You mean the accident itself is bad?"

He nodded. "As bad as it can get. Double fatality. Man and girl. Young, I'd say. At least the girl was. And very beautiful. Red-headed. Not a mark on her. But they're having difficulty getting the man out. Though he's beyond aid. They sent for cutting gear. It turned upside-down. An MG."

She felt the blood leave her face, though it wouldn't be visible, in this storm, with the wet strands of witch-locks whipping across it. She swung her door open, had her seat-belt undone in a split second, and almost sent him sprawling. He started to say, "What the hell—" then grabbed her arm. "Hold on, surely you can't want to see it? . . . He's not a pretty sight. I want you to turn—"

She shook her arm free, "I've *got* to see it—"

He said furiously, "What possible reason could you have?"

In a flash because she couldn't begin to explain the horrible surmise, she said intensely: "Because I'm a newspaper woman!"

He said, "My God! There are some of the ghoulish breed already there. It must've happened three-quarters of an hour ago. I insist you turn this car and take the first turn to the left, or at the very least move your car into that farm gateway."

Fear had engulfed her. She said through her teeth, "Move it yourself, the keys are in the ignition," and she ran past and stumbled into a ditch in case he tried to stop her. The ditch would've been dry earlier but certainly wasn't now. She ploughed on unheedingly. There was a horrible moment when she had to gasp out to the police, "I think I know them, a dark man, and a very beautiful redhead. I knew they were ahead of me. I work with them both. Please, please let me see. I can take it."

They cleared a way for her. They were just lifting Martin out. She identified both, numb with shock. Could it be? All that feminine beauty and masculine vigour come to this, their voices stilled forever. How much better it would have been to be just facing a broken engagement. This . . . this would just about kill Martin's mother, and Virginia's parents, and her twin sister. She must never, never tell what she had found out.

A very solicitous policeman and policewoman took her back to where she'd left her car. The angry stranger had at least concealed the keys under the floormat. The policewoman drove her car to London, following the police car and they both accompanied her when she had to break the news to the families. She had no chance to explain to that justly irate stranger what had happened but perhaps he'd be at the inquest.

He wasn't. Possibly hadn't witnessed the crash, had just assisted later. But now for a new life.

For it was all in the past and she was winging her way across the globe, in search of forgetfulness.

It seemed so short a time, in actual hours, till she was zooming down in Auckland, the City of Sails, to change planes for Dunedin in the South Island. A truly perfect

panoramic view, from east to west, mountains and lakes, with a tantalising glimpse of Wellington, her birthplace, with its exquisite harbour, on the way. She was to have an overnight stop in Dunedin and change to the small morning plane to take her to Ludwigtown with its primitive airfield on the shore of *Moana-Kotare*, the Lake of the Kingfisher.

Suddenly she was there and on the other side of the barrier, Theresa Gunn, her distant kinswoman, looking hardly changed at all from when she and her husband, Murdoch Gunn, with their two children, had spent time with them at Tante Evelina's house in Saltzburg. Almost instantly Greta felt a lift of the heart. Theresa had that effect on people. Happiness radiated from her.

Murdoch was the principal of the local high school, and had thought he could use Greta in relief work, till her qualifications were sorted out and she could obtain a permanent position.

Theresa was rapturous. "We've got the most perfect job lined up for you. I'm almost envying you the chance. It's at the back of beyond, yet a very scenic part, a large estate, with several houses on it for the staff and families, plus three single men housed in chalets. The children need someone to supervise their correspondence lessons. In other words, a governess. Oh, listen to me, but I can't help bursting out with it right away. Anyway, your luggage won't be through yet. No posh carousels here. Just trolleys, and you pick up your own. The mothers out at the Kingdom are thrilled. They've been supervising the lessons themselves since the last governess got married. They have to, mostly, on these high-country sheep-stations. So you are being welcomed with open arms. It's a very remote valley, with access through the road that runs round Lake Wakatipu where Queenstown is, a gem of a beauty-spot."

Greta seized on one word. "Kingdom? What—"

"It's always been called that, from gold-mining day. Caleb's Kingdom. But this Caleb is about five generations down the line. Oh, here's the trolley. I'm so glad Murdoch's off out with a class today, over to some of the historical Arrowtown spots. Our two have gone along.

That means we can talk our heads off with no interruptions."

Soon they were at the Rectory, as the principal's house was still called. She was informed access was over a rather fearsome road, "But you'll think nothing of that, some of the places you've been dragged off to. In fact there are two ways in now. The new one goes in off the road to Glenorchy. For years and years that was blocked by a landslip, about twelve miles past Queenstown, but then along came an entrepeneur type, visited the Pengellys at Nathaniel's Wilderness, assumed he'd be able to buy Nathaniel out, and struck an unyielding opposition. So he pushed further in, bought land from the Beaumont boys, who had no ancestral ties with the land, and set up a hunting, fishing, shooting type of luxury ranch, and offered to have Big Slip cleared away if they'd grant him the access. They did, and that meant Caleb Armstrong was able to have a new road bulldozed into *his* valley, also at a price . . . he has to let a few tourists go in from time to time to be shown how his property is worked. He runs sheep, red deer, dry cattle, so it suits him. He still has a sneaking fondness for the old mule-track leading in from the Drumlogie guest-house on the Gorge Road, though. It's the most beautiful valley. When you climb out of it on the far side, there is an immense plateau that leads to the foothills and the Big Fellows."

Greta was sparkling-eyed. "I'm going to love it. I feel it in my bones." Murdoch arrived back, children in tow. Greta said to him, "Tell me, was the first Caleb an autocrat? Ruler of his realm?"

Murdoch nodded. "He certainly was. There were still some pretty tough characters about from the mining days. But in his fifties he fell in love with a young girl who tamed him."

Theresa gave her husband a saucy look. "Well, most men *are* tough till they meet the right woman." Murdoch gave his wife the sort of look Greta envied her for. She had thought them an ideal couple when they had met in Saltzburg.

He chuckled. "Agreed. though they sometimes lead us a pretty dance first. Anyway, Greta, Ursula Niven who was

once Caleb's governess, but keeps house for him now, was delighted with what we told her about you. That the isolation wouldn't mean a thing to you, that you'd lived in far more outlandish places with your people and were an excellent driver to boot. So she said to snap you up."

Greta seized on one word. "*Caleb's* housekeeper? Do you really mean there's still a Caleb there?"

Murdoch nodded. "Yes, fifth generation. And worthy of the name."

Greta looked apprehensive. You mean he's just as tough as his forebear? Then I sincerely hope he's wed to someone who will tame him."

"No, he isn't, and at present he's footloose and fancy-free. He's overseas travelling on a very well-deserved award. He's a very knowledgeable guy, has studied the markets well and has proved a great asset to our country. Lectures quite a bit when he can spare the time. That's why we want things running on oiled wheels when he returns, which will be quite soon. But it will give you time to settle in. When he left they had a splendid governess. Caleb always reckons he can keep his men better if their wives are contented. If, that is, they don't have to oversee the lessons from the Correspondence School in addition to all their other duties. His men seem to stay long-term, but the governess suddenly upped and offed. Quite romantic. We didn't grudge her a moment of her happiness. She wasn't young, had quarrelled with the love of her life years before and he'd gone to Canada. He had a holiday at Chester Burroughs' ranch and one day a whole cavalcade of them went up a narrow track on horseback, to the Kingdom. The shepherds' wives always put on refreshments; Caleb lets them do that as a way of earning money, and Olga Edwards always helped them. It was like something on TV, Ursie said. They just stared at each other, gasped out their names, began walking towards each other, hands outstretched. Then recollected where they were but as soon as possible, disappeared. He carried her off to Canada within a month.

"It's a very well equipped schoolroom, Greta, in the big old homestead and twice a year the kids spend a

week or two here in the schools at Ludwigtown. How about it?"

"I think I'd love it. The only thing is wouldn't this Caleb character have preferred to pick his governess himself?"

"No, he's got a great opinion of my wife. Would rely on her judgement, and he'll be far too busy when he comes back. He's got to report to agricultural committees in the Capital first. He'll be only too glad to find no vacancy. Have no fears. You'll be well settled in when he gets back."

That was true enough. In three weeks' time she couldn't believe her good fortune. She had been enchanted from the time they struck off the Glenorchy road a dozen miles beyond Queenstown, turning their backs on the immense sapphire lake, rimmed by mountains where on the far side lay a few sheep-runs, accessible only by water. They were immediately on a splendid road, curved and undulating, carved through Big Slip and which had almost ruined the viability of the property. Until, that is, Nathaniel Pengelly, whose mother's forebears had farmed there, had left the safe environment of his father's Dunedin drapery store, and brought it back to a measure of prosperity again, even though Big Slip had remained a costly barrier to transporting their wool out. Then Chester Burroughs, unable to secure the Wilderness for his holiday ranch, had struck a bargain . . . a road in exchange for access. Hitching-rails were still at the lake-edge road, mute reminders of the days when if emergency struck, someone had to saddle up and ride through Big Slip to stop some motorist on the way to Queenstown.

One of the shepherds, with his family, had come down from the Kingdom in station-wagon, to get her, three days after Greta's arrival. Myrna Fairbairn Greta had liked on sight, with Lance, her husband, and their three children: Bart about eight, Bridget ten, and Kirsty, over twelve, who would be going to Ludwig High School next year as a schoolday boarder, returning every weekend to the Kingdom.

Theresa had prepared Greta for the difference in ages, which was a little daunting in view of lessons. The head

shepherd, the manager in Caleb's absence, had four, but the youngest was just a baby. The lessons were geared for this sort of life and the radio sessions from the school in Wellington, excellent.

The Wilderness was a fine-looking homestead on a terrace built high in case of flooding in the early days, small Bart informed her, and a modern one on the opposite side where the married couple lived. By the size of the outbuildings, Greta guessed it must cater for large musters. Once out of the valley, miles on, evidences of the more luxurious surroundings of Burroughs' Hunting Lodge showed up and his territory, Bridget said, spread a vast distance into the ranges westward, though, as Kirsty added, with great satisfaction, "It doesn't come *too* near us."

Greta obligingly asked why and was told: "We like the Kingdom as it is, not crowded. We climb high, then dip down into our valley and between their territory and ours Jagged Ridge makes a perfect boundary as well as a . . . as a . . ."

Her father filled in for her. "As well as a legal one." Then he went on, "But one thing we are grateful for is that Burroughs took his scenic road in a wide sweep near one of the lower slopes of the Ridge and Caleb took advantage of that to cut an easier way through than we had before. In return for being able to use the road through to the Lake Road, Caleb allows parties to visit at intervals to see the routine work of a high-country station. So it's not as solitary as you'd have found years ago."

"Is the other road used much? It used to be just a mule-track leading from the Drumlogie Guest House, I believe?"

"Not as much as the new road. It's just not the track it was in the gold-mining days, but it's still pretty rough, even hazardous. And where it drops down to the valley, it edges round some very exposed bluffs. Caleb insists we all use this one . . . I know it's not exactly like the tar-sealed roads of England, but compared with the other, it's a billiard-table."

Greta said quietly, not boastfully, "I've driven on some

very tough roads in my time. Dad was always getting sent to remote trouble spots in the name of peace."

Lance responded, "Murdoch Gunn told us that when he recommended you to Ursula. Even our new road beyond the Lodge has been known to daunt some drivers. So we're lucky to get you. It's no place for the chicken-hearted."

"Lucky in more ways than one," said Myrna with real feeling. "None of us looked forward to supervising lessons indefinitely."

Bart said sturdily, "Besides, we like having a teacher who isn't one of the mums."

His mother laughed. "Yes, something to be said for both sides."

Kirsty added, "And it's splendid having someone new to answer questions. Do you mind children asking lots of questions?"

Greta said, "Not at all, as long as they're asked at the right time, and not with the intention of diverting the teacher away from the main point of the lesson. I can detect a red herring at forty paces."

"Gosh," said Bart. "D'ye hear that, Bridget?"

Kirsty muttered darkly, "That's the best instance I've ever heard of the pot calling the kettle black!" Bart subsided.

They left the Hunting Lodge Road and began to climb a hill that was a little lower than those heights that rose up awesomely against the western sky. Although it was a late August day, therefore almost spring in New Zealand, these still had pockets of snow on them. In fact if it hadn't been for the almost perpendicular nature of the rocky peaks, which couldn't hold snow, they would have been unbroken white. That was left to the heights still further in, that sparkled against the cloudless blue of the sky.

They arrived at the top where Lance drew into a tussock-clad lookout. He braked carefully, gestured them out, and as an extra precaution chocked the wheels with rocks, saying, "Only fair to let you gaze your fill the first time on." There was pride in his voice. No wonder. The whole valley was bathed in sunshine. It was far more extensive than she'd dreamed, the sides criss-crossed by waterfalls, and tracks

leading up on all sides through pockets of native bush that promised an abundance of bird-life.

Seeing the far-off buildings, Greta exclaimed delightedly, "Oh, it's just like an Austrian village!" her beauty-loving eyes following down the terraces carved by water-force in the long-ago, through lines of larch and pine where here and there peeped the roofs of chalets, something she hadn't expected to find here.

Lance nodded, "That was the idea of the first Caleb's young wife, Gretchen Armstrong, daughter of one of the Austrian miners. She was born at Ludwigtown but her father went back to Austria. The first Caleb visited there, in his late forties, I think, fell in love with her, and brought her here. They said everyone, including Caleb, adored her."

"Ludwigtown was my mother's birthplace," said Greta softly, "she was connected, rather distantly, with the Klausners."

"Then you've come to the right place," said Myrna. "Old Caleb housed his men in the chalets. Said their mid-winter snows didn't cling as long, because of their steep roofs. Now the three single men use them and old Ben cooks for them in the shearers' quarters. Lives there himself. Two spare chalets are used for guests at times. But come over here, you can't see the homestead from this angle."

"Oh, it's a nooks-and-crannies house. Long and low. Really elongated. I suppose they just added to it as the need arose?"

"Yes, and curved to follow the line of the hill, yet far enough away from it to allow a maximum of sunshine, important here where we lose the sun behind the ranges so early. The long curve of windows facing this way doesn't belong to rooms, it's a sort of passageway. All the rooms lead off it, towards the sun. One English visitor called it the gallery. And the two-storey gable in the middle marks Ursie's quarters. The schoolroom quarters are on the right end, quite self-contained."

"I love it already," declared Greta.

Myrna gave a happy sigh. "Wonderful. We were afraid you'd be daunted."

Greta turned an amazed face to her, "I think it looks like Eden." She laughed, "Now don't tell me there's a serpent!" She added, "The only dread I have is the owner's return. I'd much rather he'd engaged me. But having my own rooms will make that easier. The poor man may easily, otherwise, dread the thought of having a chattering female at every meal. I think you can live at too close quarters."

Myrna said uncertainly, "The other governess I know, just did her own breakfast. Had lunch and dinner with Ursie and Caleb. I really can't see them letting you have solitary meals all the time, and Ursie's the soul of hospitality."

"We'll have to come to some arrangement. It mightn't work otherwise. But what a well-laid-out garden. And the out-buildings have a European air too."

"You get that all over the gold-mining area. Some of them were Forty-niners, you know. Went from Europe to the Californian diggings in 1849, then to Bendigo in Australia, and, as strikes there dwindled, and Gabriel Read struck gold at Waitahuna, the miners rushed here. But perhaps your mother will have told you. One of the biggest strikes of all was in the Arrow River, nearby.

"She left here as a quite small child, when her people moved to the North Island. Well, thank you, Lance, for letting me drink all this in. Now all it needs for my mind to be at ease, is for this Caleb Armstrong to approve me. After all he has the say-so."

Lance burst out laughing. "Talk about making up your mind ahead of time. I don't suppose you know much more about him than his name. I believe Caleb means bold and certainly the name of Armstrong was feared along the Border. And with cause and justification, but it was known for chivalry too, and valour."

Greta blinked. "My goodness, you *are* knowledgeable. I like that. But you'd better watch it, I might regard you as an asset in the classroom. Of course Scotsmen have always been well-known for emigrating – no wonder when they were so persecuted in their own territory – but also well-known for retaining their Scottish links. And I realise Fairbairn is Scottish."

"Yes, but Lance certainly isn't. But then my mother loved Tennyson. However, one of the kings of Scotland gave the Armstrongs Fairbairn lands on the Borders, so in a clan sort of way, Caleb and I are connected. He's a good chap. I don't know what you've heard about him. He's a bit granity, I daresay. Doesn't suffer fools gladly but he's a just man, not prejudiced, either."

Greta said slowly, "Whenever I hear that expression not suffering fools gladly, it *does* sound prejudiced. Conjures up the image of someone intolerant, aggressive." She coloured up, saying, "I'm letting my tongue run away with me and that's stupid I know. It's just as intolerant to have preconceived ideas."

Myrna giggled, "Oh, don't worry about us. I'd feel just the same coming into a self-contained community like ours. We rather like people who speak their minds. Anyway, in less than three weeks the King-of-the-castle will be home and you can form your own opinion. At least you'll have settled down amongst us in your own way without feeling you're being watched and assessed by the one who holds your paypacket in his hands. I guess like us, he'll think he's lucky to get you."

Greta laughed back. "I can scarcely recognize myself, I'm not usually quite so frank. I'm grateful you've taken it so well. Now, let's go down into the valley and the children can go on pointing out the landmarks."

Ursula turned out to be, as Greta had already guessed seeing she'd been Caleb's governess, well on in her sixties. She understood children very well, as she said to them, "I daresay you're dying to show her the schoolroom block so I'll let you as long as you don't keep her too long. Then you can bring her back for a cup of tea to give me a chance of a yarn with her, and you can scamper off to let the Rogers' crowd come over."

The schoolroom gave evidence of generations of children, from the old-fashioned maps on the walls and desks with inkwells set into them, fortunately empty, to a room that had been fashioned from an alcove and held up-to-date computers. The piano bore signs of years of use, even to

stains from candle-wax, but proved to be well-tuned and melodious. Bridget lovingly swept her fingers over the keys in a phrase from *Humoresque* and said, unexpectedly, "Caleb taught me to play that."

The sitting-room went off the schoolroom and was well equipped with bookshelves comfortably full of books, and some well-used furniture, a little old-fashioned, mellow in tone and style.

The kitchen was beyond that, with a modern electric stove but also a Dover stove that rested on iron legs and jutted out into the room. "In case snow brings the lines down," Bart informed her. "It's wood-burning. We like this stove because it's beaut for roasting chestnuts on." He added hastily, "That's if you don't mind the mess. They explode all over the place." His glance was hopeful and all eyes looked anxious.

She said promptly, "Sounds gorgeous. I've not roasted chestnuts since we were in Austria. I hope the season's not over."

He grinned, "We kept some back in our pantry. Don't tell Mum I asked you right away, will you? I was told not to."

She gave him a gamine grin, "I don't see why the subject should arise, but let me make one thing clear, in most other matters I'll back up your parents. Just give me time to settle in and we'll have a chestnut orgy."

They were obedient because they did scamper off as soon as she went back to the living-room. She said to Ursula Niven, "I'm most intrigued to find that my end is two-storey, with three bedrooms. The trees hid it from the lookout. I'll take the one with that lovely gable window. It's so positioned you can see right through a cleft in the hills for a blue glimpse of the lake itself, all those miles away. The children told me the mountains I could see were actually on the far side of Wakatipu."

Ursie nodded. "Yes, even though the valley walls are steep, it's really just a dent in hills far above sea-level. I got so attached to that view and suite of rooms that when I retired, Caleb actually built an annexe out the back, so I still had privacy and it was two-storeyed so that I could

have practically the same view. Cost a packet, too, because getting building material up here means expensive transport but he said he couldn't imagine me ever going away from the estate. My husband was employed here too. So it holds all my most precious memories."

Greta nodded. "I can imagine how hard it would be to leave scenery like this. Was there only Caleb to be taught? In the family, I mean."

"No, There is a sister, Judy, a darling girl I still miss, who married a North Island farmer whose father sent him down here for high-country experience. Caleb's mother lives near them. And there was an older brother, Alastair. He would have inherited the estate but he was away at the Agricultural College, Lincoln, and contracted a fatal illness." She moved to one of the windows of the kitchen, waved towards the far hillside, "He lies out there. Our own burial plot. Caleb went to Lincoln too, because it was his father's wish they knew a world apart from the Kingdom. He did well, was in the running for a lectureship, but he seemed glad to get back, apart from knowing what it would mean to his father to have no-one to follow on. From the very first I felt that the Kingdom was my destiny, and carrying on gave me a purpose in life after I lost my true love. We had no children of our own."

Greta felt moved. It was good of a woman of Ursula's age to say as much to a stranger. Maybe she, too, would find a purpose in life here, and though she still had tremors at meeting the owner, he might not prove as formidable as she had somehow imagined him. After all, a man, who at considerable personal cost, had contrived to preserve for his governess her favourite view needn't be a man of granite, a curmudgeon. Time would tell.

It certainly did tell. Three weeks later, Greta, having proved to the station hands that the access road didn't terrify her, was allowed to take the big four-wheel-drive truck down to Ludwigtown the Saturday Caleb Armstrong was arriving home. She was pleased about this. Much better than meeting him for the first time surrounded by the whole crowd here.

Naturally he'd insist on driving himself and she'd be able to sum him up from his conversation.

Well, she was certainly able to do that! She was in the little sunroom off the Rectory living-room when Theresa could be heard bringing him in from collecting him from the airport.

Murdoch had a group of the school-children, including his own two, on a nature study class up the Arrow Gorge. Greta decided not to rush out till Theresa called her. She could hear them talking animatedly as they came through the house and continued as they reached the living-room. Animated was hardly the adequate word, as she found out in thirty seconds.

She heard Caleb Armstrong say in an exasperated voice, "I can't get over it, Tess. I wish Murdoch was here. I'd ask him had he lost his senses? How could he let you get the bit so firmly between your teeth that you let your sympathies run away with you to the extent of asking a girl from London . . . London, the hub of the universe, to come out to a wild, isolated spot like the Kingdom to teach half a dozen children? I know you said she has had teaching experience, and that she'd suffered an emotional blow, and her mother appealed to you." He snorted, "Well, it may have the effect of sending her flying back to civilisation in no time, that's one consolation, but I honestly think you've had a brainstorm. Or is it that she can't cope with the sometimes horrifying stresses in today's teaching world over there?"

Theresa didn't sound in the least intimidated. "Go on blowing your top, Caleb, it'll get it out of your system. You're all sound and fury, but once it's over with you, it's over. But she wasn't running away from the complex problems of teaching over there . . . in fact Murdoch could tell you things that would make your hair stand on end, believe me, right here in Ludwigtown."

"That's a red herring, and you know it, Theresa Gunn. I would like to tell you—"

"Now hold your horses, Caleb Gunn. She did *not* leave a teaching job. It's some years since she gave up teaching. Her people moved all over the place. Her father has some

important trouble-shooting job and she wanted to be with them. They come back to London periodically, she's got a knack with words, and she found a niche for herself in the newspaper world. They liked her stuff so well they gave her a sort of roving commission. Has made a name for herself—"

He groaned. It sounded as if his ire had increased, not diminished. "Did you say a newspaper woman? That's even worse. If there's one thing I can't stand it's newspaper women. Believe me, I got thoroughly sickened with the news world over there. I can't imagine one of them being even remotely suitable to be governessing at the back of beyond. It's not fair to the kids."

It was too much for Greta. She wrenched the door open, flung it wide with a dramatic gesture, and advanced upon him. "I can't believe what I've just heard! Talk about prejudice! Do you realize that if you had said you couldn't stand Greeks or Pakistanis or Maoris, you could be justly accused of racism? Anyone who makes a wildly unbalanced remark like that *deserves* to have a label thrust upon him. Generalised statements like that are too ridiculous for words. I can't believe it. I've met with nothing but appreciation from all at Caleb's Kingdom, the married couples, Ursie, the children, the hired hands!"

He looked completely taken aback at her eruption and attack and no wonder. He rallied, said, "Oh, I can imagine you put it it over the single men all right, they'd have no trouble at all fitting you into life up there. Who wouldn't? A female and a blonde to boot! That's nothing in your favour either. Doesn't exactly make for harmony."

Greta could have stamped her foot. "You are clean mad. And I'm not a blonde, just straw-coloured. I've been just like one of the men with them, they've had me up to the huts, out in the riverbed, even greasing the trucks with them."

He gaped. "Greasing the trucks, why, they must be besotted. I tell you—"

"No, *I'll* tell *you*. I did the greasing in my own time and what I do out of the schoolroom is no business of yours. I'm just not the sort to spend my leisure hours sitting in a

corner *tatting!* I've been with my father in some very tight corners where mechanics were as scarce as hen's teeth and Dad and I had to turn our hands to anything. The nearest garage could be fifty miles away."

He looked dazed. All of a sudden Theresa sank into a chair; gave way to mirth. They both stared at her. She sobered up, gasped, "Oh, I do wish Murdoch had been here! He'll think I'm exaggerating. Well, after a blow-up like this, you're bound to be the best of friends in time. It usually works that way. Caleb, you're stuck. Most girls would march out on you and I wouldn't blame her, but all her gear is at the estate. Besides, the mothers would be so enraged with you they'd probably go on strike. *They've* no fault to find with her. She's the Ursie breed all over again. Ask Ursie herself."

For the first time Greta saw the big man at a loss. She said crisply, "You don't know where to go from here, do you? I can understand that. You'd no idea I was in here and you were quarrelling so furiously, I couldn't have stopped you if I'd tried. One part of me wants to go up to the valley, collect my things, and vanish from mortal ken. But I couldn't do that to the children there. Their lessons mustn't be disjointed again. Apart from anything else they seem to think the world of *you* and I wouldn't disillusion them for anything. But if in six months you find me totally unworthy of the position, or personally incompatible, I'll resign, giving you enough time to get a replacement. Now, is it possible for us to behave as if this hasn't happened?"

Theresa gulped and said, "I'll put on a quick lunoh."

Caleb shook his head. "If you don't mind, Tess, I'd rather get going now. I'm going home via Drumlogie. I need to see Giles about something. I rang him from Christchurch. They'll give us a bite at the restaurant there. Who drove down? Was it Buck? Where do we pick him up?"

"We won't have to delay for that," said Greta evenly. "*I* drove down."

He looked at her with disbelief. "That's the big truck. Was something wrong with the station-wagon? Much easier."

"Well, Lance wanted that huge roll of wire-netting you can see on the tray, and those two drums of diesel, so he asked me to take the truck. Oh, it's okay, I've got an international heavy traffic licence. I had to have it for some of the places I had to drive Dad to."

"Why? Couldn't he drive himself?"

"There was a time when Dad had an injured leg for three months. It was sheer necessity."

"Know all the answers, don't you?"

"Not really. It's just that you have the knack of asking the wrong questions."

Theresa showed signs of succumbing again so Greta said hastily, "Let's go. I've just a couple of bags of goodies to pick up from the kitchen. The keys are in the ignition." The next moment she was staring at him. "What is it? You've got an odd look on your face." Then she said: "Surely it's okay to leave keys in the ignition at the back of the Rectory. I wouldn't leave them in in the street."

He seemed to shake his head as if to clear it. "No, no. Of course it's okay. It was just that it – oh, let it go. It doesn't matter."

She went out to the kitchen, picked up the treats she'd bought in Queenstown for the children; the three of them went to the truck.

He took a step towards it, hesitated, said, "No, *you* drive, if it won't make you nervous, seeing I've been so critical of you. I'd like to see how you conduct yourself on these roads before I let you loose on some of the rougher tracks around the estate. Even if you feel you've proved yourself driving down here."

"I think Buck's had me on most of the old trails. And up the riverbed, but just as you wish." She slipped into the driver's seat, proceeded through the quiet streets of Ludwigtown, and after a few miles of almost deserted roads, headed through the tourist-thronged streets of Queenstown.

They turned into the Gorge Road among rising heights and she was directed up the drive to Drumlogie.

Chapter Two

Drumlogie was just a short distance out of Queenstown and led in under a rustic archway of rough-barked *manuka* branches. A short drive wound uphill and through a delightful garden steeply landscaped around the glacial rocks that had remained embedded in the terrain when the Ice Age had begun to thaw. It underlined for Greta that in this area she was very conscious of the changes time had wrought. She said so, to break the silence before she must meet strangers.

He nodded. "That's so; even pre-historic happenings are engraved into the land, not built over as in cities, and lost. It even makes the pioneer and gold-mining history seem to have happened only yesterday."

She was surprised into saying, "That's an excellent way of putting it. I could use that in the schoolroom, which is a good thing to emphasize, because the children here have grown up with this scenery as matter-of-fact or commonplace, and I'm keen on them describing it in essays in the dramatic language it deserves."

He said, without a glimmer of a smile on his face, or trace of amusement in his voice, "Thank you very much, Miss Mountford. I hope I get an Excellent stamp for that."

She laughed. "Sorry, hope I didn't sound patronising. Perhaps I thought you too took your surroundings for granted." She was relieved to hear him chuckle.

"I never have. Dad saw to it that none of us took the grandeur and ruggedness for granted. He said that familiarity was dangerous, blinded us to the real risks of this terrain. It can't be taken lightly. The weather moods, the sudden swing of them, are unbelievable. That's why I was so astounded

at Murdoch and Tess. I thought of the contrast between London and England's gentle countryside. It seemed too great a transition. Now, don't take offence at that again. You've told me your father had the sort of job that took him all over the place. And if you've spent some time in India, at least great distances won't appal you. I concede that."

Concede! The patronising devil! They came through the play-area to a wider space of terraces and flowerbeds and an impressive array of buildings. Caleb Armstrong said, "We won't go over to the restaurant yet. Giles said to come straight to the homestead. I've got some reports for him. Tourist stuff from New Zealand House mostly, but some from Europe. Lucinda's brother and his wife run the restaurant. Lucinda's half-brother, really. Giles runs the farming side. Oh, they've heard us. Lucinda is running. One of these days she'll hurtle clean down those steps."

Lucinda held out her hands in greeting, took Greta's and to her immense surprise kissed her. "I've been dying to meet you. Tess tells me you know India. My parents were missionaries there. You are bound to know some of the places I know, and can't share with anyone else. We do get guests from there at times, but not often. You're having lunch with us, not going to the restaurant, though I've pinched some of their choicer dishes from over there. I'm sorry our two are away but you can meet them some other time. They were spending the night in Queenstown."

Under the cordial atmosphere of the dinner-table, Greta felt her temper subside. It was evident that the mothers at the Kingdom had been singing their new governess's praises over the telephone. Lucinda said: "They can't believe their luck, getting you. Myrna said to me the other day they have to restrain the children from encroaching too much on your spare time but that you even encourage them exploring with you, or visiting you. I heard tales of chestnut-roasting and charades."

Greta felt the colour rise to her cheeks. "Only after school-hours," she said defensively, "and in any case, in a way, the charades are educational. Makes them remember the spelling of portmanteau words when you've acted out a

few syllables. The only thing is they get so carried away at times, that in some of the oral lessons, one of them will butt in with: 'What a neat word that'd be for a charade.' That happened recently with 'catastrophe'. We had to act it out that very evening, with all the families present. I had quite a time working everyone in. It quite superseded the charms of TV, and I must confess I was surprised to see the single men and Ben come in." She surprised a knowing look on Caleb's face and added hurriedly, and apologetically, "With so many we had to use the big lounge but I did warn them we couldn't expect that privilege when you got back."

To her surprise he grinned. "Maybe I could be part of the appreciative male audience too. I'm not an ogre, you know, even if I sounded like one, off-stage, this morning."

Lucinda and Giles didn't hide their curiosity. Greta tried to stop Caleb but she didn't know him well enough to know how to. He said, quite without shame, "Tess met me at the airport and because the new governess was at the Rectory, so short a distance from the airport, she had to explain her hastily. So I was still blowing my top and Greta was in the sun-room, and heard the lot! Tess tried to stop me in case she was within hearing, but hadn't guessed *how* near she was, and suddenly the door flew open and a positive virago fell upon me, if not with fists, with words. Blistering words. She wiped the floor with me."

"That I'd have liked to see," said Giles, beginning to enjoy himself hugely.

Greta pulled herself together, "Well, he bellowed like a bull and—"

Lucinda collapsed into laughter. "Just like Giles! *He's* all fizz and roar too. But what on earth had upset you, Caleb?"

"Well, the idea of getting staff from London for our isolated pocket of the back country hit me for six to begin with, and the thought of a newspaper woman finished me and I generalised . . . said I couldn't stand them and that Murdoch must've gone raving mad and the next moment the embodiment of fury fell upon me and tore me to shreds. Called me a racist."

"A racist? *You*? But how could she?" This was Lucinda.

"I did *not*!" exclaimed Greta, really incensed. "When he said he couldn't stand newspaper women that really did it. I hate generalisations and said if he'd said he couldn't stand Greeks or Pakistanis or Maoris he'd be branded a racist. I could also have said he was a male chauvinist. I wish I'd thought of it."

They were all laughing now except Greta. Caleb said: "I was already mad with Theresa because she scored one over me on the way home. I said to her, "I hope you know what you've done but surely Murdoch would know you can't let people come into this country without a work permit. She ought to have applied as an immigrant, and believe me, that takes ages," and Tess floored me by saying she was born in Wellington, that she had a New Zealand passport. She said it in such a gentle self-righteous tone it made me madder than ever. I'd hardly got over that when I was confronted with a sort of geyser that would rival the best in Rotorua."

He stopped and just as Greta opened her mouth to say something just as scorching, he added: "And I deserved every bit of it. I've just realised, Lucinda, now you've put me in the picture of how they regard her at the Kingdom, I'll be expected to grovel."

"Indeed you won't," said Greta spiritedly, "You look neither the grovelling sort to me nor one to allow others to influence your opinions. I meant what I said. I won't leave the children or their mothers in the lurch but you can regard me as on probation and I'll put *you* on probation too, as a boss!"

Giles, grinning, said, "This is about as ill-omened as the way Lucinda and I met. My first words to her were: 'What the hell do you think you're doing, stampeding my cattle?' She was in a temper too, she'd fallen in a cow-platter, she was chasing a hare she'd run over and wanted to rescue, and she gave me a right dressing-down about how callous farmers were, that if she did catch it, I'd probably kill it, and ended by telling me I was a real Farmer Giles type, and for some reason it made her madder than ever when she found out I was called that!"

Caleb said, "Go on . . . you can't stop there. Tell me how you handled it, man. The first time I met Lucinda, you were putting on some items for guests in the lounge. She was sitting at a spinning-wheel and you were positively coo-ing at her . . . well, singing an old song about 'Lucy at her spinning-wheel.' I thought it must've been love at first sight. What happened in between?"

"She caught the hare . . . it had stopped under a bush; I put it in a sack over my saddle and not before it had scratched me from wrist to elbow . . . not that I got any sympathy . . . and she accused me of taking it away to kill and when I said I'd put it in a hen-house to recover, she said, okay but to make sure, she'd come out next day to be certain I kept my word. The rest is history. I fell madly in love with her, but a pretty dance she led me."

Much the words Murdoch had used to his Theresa, and the look Giles gave his Lucinda matched the look Greta had envied the Gunns for earlier. How ridiculous. She didn't want to have those sort of thoughts. Just part and parcel of dreams destroyed so brutally all those months ago.

She said matter-of-factly, "Well, if that could happen perhaps Caleb Armstrong and I will settle down amicably as employer and employee." A thought struck her, "We'll put our initial clash down to descendants of fierce Border clans meeting. Though I haven't a clue about those same feuds to know if the Armstrongs and Elliots were sworn enemies."

"And it wouldn't matter if they were. You're the daughter of a man who is a peace-maker. He'd be ashamed of you. Anyway, what do you mean . . . Elliots? If ever there's a name indicative of having come over with the Conqueror it's Mountford. It's not Scots at all."

"My middle name is Elliot, my mother's maiden name."

The two men did some business together and Lucinda showed Greta over her lovely old home. Then they had to leave.

When Greta slid behind the wheel, the other two expressed surprise. "You must've won him over already." said Giles. "I've never known him let anyone drive him. He takes it as his unassailable right."

"Smacks of a lord-of-the-manor air to me," said Caleb's newest employee, "but it's really becauses he would like to see me buckle at the knees. That was his reaction to the manager actually allowing a greenhorn, or what he supposed to be a greenhorn, to bring the truck down."

Giles looked alarmed. "Well, since you came down by the other road, Greta, you might imagine this one is twin to it. Caleb, I don't think you'd better let her take this cutting down to the valley."

Caleb snorted. "Do you take me for a fool? She can drive as far as the Gate Beautiful where we branch off."

The engine sprang to life under Greta's fingers and they were off. She made up her mind she wouldn't take up the argument. He'd just put his foot down and had the right to do so. She said mildly as anyone might, "I hadn't expected such open country back behind here. Very beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a valley-floor really, much wider than ours. In the old days, when Giles's forebears farmed it, it was considered really remote. Ours was reached then only by a mule-track, in fact, in the gold-strike, mostly on foot." He waved towards a little graveyard, "That's mute testimony to the fact of how impossible it was, to get to Queenstown for burials. Sometimes when death struck, they were snow-bound. You'll have seen ours, of course?"

"Yes, and I think it very lovely, on that rising ground, with the song of the pines overhead. I also like the fact that the present generation still chooses to be buried there, within sight and sound of the place they loved so well in their days on earth. I also like the fact that some of the men who worked on the place even in recent years, chose to be buried there."

"Yes, but then they're part of it too. Spent half or more of their lives here. Oh, we've had a few who couldn't take it, found it too much like the back of beyond, and stayed only a few weeks, attracted in the first place by the isolation allowance added to their wages, but in the main, ours stay on for years. They always did."

This was better. They were on more neutral ground. "You said we strike off at the Gate Beautiful. Sounds intriguing.

It's a great area for fitting names. Almost every feature is identified. But the Gate Beautiful sounds biblical. Is it a natural feature, formed between rocks?"

"No, built by Ellen, the first bride at the Wilderness. She and her Grigor came from Scotland where the big estates had imposing gates, of course, and she built it with her own fair hands. It was an unnecessary thing, because there was no fence there to need a gate; the natural boundaries were all the early settlers had, rivers, gorges, small streams, outcrops of rock, ranges of foothills. Ellen had more than enough to do, the women of that day had. They boiled their coppers for washing clothes down by the streams for handiness to water, churned butter, made cheeses, candles, bread. Pickled beef and mutton, used the fats to make soap, helped with the shearing and crutching and a hundred other things besides. But she loved the coloured stones of this area, drove a dray up to here, mixed mortar and cemented them in herself. I wondered if she did all that in the face of opposition from her husband, but no. He so appreciated it that when she had done he got an old Scots stone-mason from the gold-fields to carve her two ornamental thistle-heads to crown her work, unknown to Ellen till they were set in place on her thirty-fifth birthday. Who says the men of the Victorian era weren't romantic? Were tyrants?"

"Oh, I like it," cried Greta, forgetting it was only hours since she had dubbed this man just that; had brawled with him. "I love Grigor for recognising that there is a place for unproductive beauty too."

He glanced at her sideways as she drove, "You've a good turn of phrase yourself."

She said drily, "Most newspaper women have. They need to dress things up."

He didn't reply and she felt she shouldn't have said it. It was one under the belt. This scenery was even more lovely than the other road. She said so. His tone was as dry as hers had been. "Perhaps, as you pointed out, you've lived in more remote places, so you find the other road too tame. But Chester had to take it through the easiest route, to make it at all possible, but I hand it to him he did all he could

to preserve the best of its natural landmarks. It's only to be expected when his tourists pay the prices he charges that they expect a reasonable amount of transport comfort in the approach. They get all the adventure they want on horseback, heading into the ranges. Many of the wives are content with the luxury of the Lodge, and he provides a mini-bus for them to sample the delights of Queenstown and trips on the lake. We lost a little of our isolation and privacy but his road made a whale of a difference to our costs of shipping stock out, wool bales, pelts and velvet, etc. However, though it's sheer sentiment, whenever I've been away any length of time, I like to come home this way. It's all ours once we pass the Gate."

Greta realized then that it hadn't been sheer cussedness that he'd made her drive this way, to test her driving skills as she had thought. She must be careful not to show off.

The Gate Beautiful came into view on the crest of a tussock-covered hill that gave it a glimpse of greater heights beyond, still snow-shawled. Caleb said, "I don't know which view is best, looking across to the sky and the peaks or when you walk closer and look down into their valley with its mixture of trees, native and European. The older ones came out from Scotland in a sailing-ship, tied up in sacking for the three months it took, and added autumn to an evergreen land."

She pulled up and they walked across to the symmetry of the Gate. She felt her resentment, her stiffness slipping away. He had his points. The strong sun beat down fiercely, making her wonder afresh, could it really be the last month of winter? They stopped, each laid a hand on the arch and took in the perfection of the view where in its sapphire sparkle lay the huge lake. He said, "I never cease to marvel at being able to see it from here, because until Chester came, much as we tried to resist him at first, when he bulldozed Big Slip away he gave back to the Wilderness – and to us – the vista which was the reason why Ellen built her gate here. Shows how prejudiced one can be. Then as Ursie said, it came right in God's good time."

A strange feeling swept over Greta. Was it possible her strong antipathy could wane like that? She hoped he would realize he was wrong about her too – assuming that she would soon long for the fleshpots, for the capitals of the world. Well, maybe she would. Because of Martin's betrayal, she'd wanted to flee, to try the platitudinous cure for heartbreak . . . new scenes, new faces, new ways of life. Caleb's voice broke through her thoughts.

"The road continues like this for only another few miles, from then on it's a challenge to any driver. It wouldn't be fair to expect you to attempt it the first time over it. Later, perhaps, when someone else has driven you to Drumlogie. It's steep and twisting and tortuous. Get into the passenger seat."

She said quietly with no hint of bravado, "I'm not saying this out of any spirit of wanting to show you I can take it, but you said challenge. I would like to tackle it. There could, possibly, come an emergency when I might have to. Buck told me of the time the other road was completely blocked by snow and Lance developed appendicitis and you drove him and Myrna over this one, with chains on the wheels in terrible conditions, to meet the ambulance at Drumlogie. I suppose it's rarely all the men are away from the homestead at the one time, though Ursie did mention once when you all got snowed in up at the huts, but ever since I've been here I've wanted to sample this road. But Buck said, "I wouldn't dare tell the boss I'd let you. Wait till he comes back."

She hadn't realise how steely those dark grey eyes could look. They matched the craggy features in sternness and searched hers. She didn't think she had a hope. Then he said slowly, "Very well. As long as you don't get carried away and begin to show me how daring you can be."

"I'm hardly as stupid as that. But if you have any doubts, Caleb, and it will make you nervous, I won't do it."

His cheeks creased into vertical lines as he smiled. "That's rather neat. Now you've got me in a cleft stick. I dare not admit to nerves."

She said slowly, "I didn't say that to force you into something you'd rather not do. I would like you to believe

that though I have many faults, a quick temper among them, I'm not devious."

"No, I don't think you are. You'd rather hit straight and hard. There's just one thing: it *is* a dangerous road. If suddenly, it appals you, I won't think any the less of you or say 'I told you so' if you suddenly ask me to take the wheel. Agreed?"

"Yes, sir, agreed." She found herself taking in several really deep breaths to relax, then climbed in. "I shan't mind you warning me of any particularly tricky hazards."

Three miles or so across a sort of plateau where scores of snowy-fleeced merinos grazed and quite a number of Hereford steers, tawny-coated in the strong sunlight, the terrain changed to deep gullies, and the road, swinging round a shoulder of the foothills, began to climb, but it was wide enough till, bearing left, they lost the sun and it became a narrow defile, with just passing-places.

Her boss said, "It's hardly likely anyone else will be on this road today, but when there is and you meet between passing-places, it's always the one on the inner side who does the reversing. Too big a drop on the outer."

She nodded. "Yes, just like in—" and stopped.

He looked at her curiously. "Just like in—?"

She said, to avoid any hint of crowing over him, "Oh, like a few steep places in the world where I've been with my father. You see, I do understand that to you I might have appeared a greenhorn but I didn't to Murdoch and Theresa. They knew my parents so well. We were all together in Salzburg some years ago. They were visiting Ernst and Evelina Klausner. There is a slight connection there, with my mother. Mother may have been an Elliot but her grandmother was a Klausner. Actually, my mother was born in Ludwigtown, a descendant of one of the Austrian gold-miners, but her parents shifted to Wellington when she was just a child."

"You were in Salzburg? Then I take it that means you drove on some of their mountain roads? Those passes, with zig-zag bends? Then I take off my hat to you."

"I wasn't meaning that. When we were there my brother

was too, so I never got a chance at the wheel. Anyway, I don't think you can compare those road surfaces to this, however twisting they were."

He was persistent. "Then where did you get this experience of reversing on the inner side?"

She hoped she didn't make him mad by appearing to score off him. She said reluctantly, "Well, Dad did get into some very remote places and my brother was only with us during holidays. Dad was attached to an exceedingly astute man as his personal aide . . . and was perhaps a bit more than that. He had a knack for defusing sticky situations. Not called a peace-maker exactly, or a peace-keeper, but a conciliator, I suppose. And sometimes pockets of resistance occur in not easily accessible spots and as he liked me to take notes for him, I often went along. They used him because you can't make much headway unless you visit personally, and try to understand people and the conditions under which they live. Dad was a natural with languages, I envy him that. I have only a smattering. So I really have driven over roads much more dangerous and even narrower than this. It's not boasting, it's just a fact."

"Where?" He wasn't going to be satisfied till she told him.

He gave her, had she but known it, full marks for the reluctant way she gave her answer. "Afghanistan," she said.

"Phew! Forgive me then for patronizing you."

"Well, you couldn't know. This was all sprung on you as soon as you flew in."

A few minutes later he said, "It does seem to me incredible that your father let you drive there even if he had an injured leg. Surely the department could have supplied a driver?"

She hesitated. Sure, it *had* been a dangerous road and not only geographically, but to tell him the full circumstances would be really rubbing it in. So she said, "Well, we'd been doing some unofficial scouting around and took the wrong road. And struck an obstacle, so he injured his leg on the way. So I had to drive."

"How old were you?"

"About twenty-five. Yes, it was three years ago."

"I thought you looked just about twenty-two now. I can see then that you've had time for the experience I couldn't credit at first.

She said, "My particulars are all on record in your office." They rounded another corner that carried a notice, 'Beware of wind gusts'. She grinned, "Just as well it's so still today. That'll be because of losing the shelter of the crags here on each side?"

"Yes, we get our worst winds in late spring and autumn. Ah, we're nearly at the top. You can pull in here for a few moments. It would be a pity not to take in this view. You can't do justice to it, driving, especially for the first time."

He indicated where, a very safe viewing place. Nevertheless he still chocked the wheels. The enchantment of it held her silent as she swept her eyes west, north and east. The south, where the adverse weather came from in this Down-Under hemisphere, was behind them. It was so different from the other way in. The height the road had attained set the horizon further away, so that you saw range upon range beyond those nearer at hand, fading into a sky that must arch above the unseen Tasman Sea towards Australia. Northward would be the highest peak of these Southern Alps, Mount Cook, or Aorangi, the cloud-piercer, and half the magic lay in knowing those dimpled contours would hide other lake-gems, while two hundred or more miles east would roar the Pacific, probably belying its name.

Down below was the endearing, more intimate detail of the shelters daring colonists had built to protect themselves from the elements, and in so doing had enhanced the beauty of the valley.

"This is my favourite view on the way home. Even more so than the glimpse of the Wilderness with the blue of the Lake beyond. I always pull in to view it, no matter how often I come this way," Caleb said.

Greta replied, "That reminds me of something we came across in the older children's lessons last week. Of how Sir Walter Scott's carriage horses were always pulled in for his

favourite view of the Eildon Hills, and when his funeral cortege passed that way his own horses were drawing the hearse and they automatically stopped for quite a time. A very poetical tribute, don't you think?"

"I do. That's the very bones of history, the sort of thing that should be remembered so that the past comes alive for children of generations far down the line. Ursie taught us like that."

This was better still. It was up to her to keep it this way. She said, "You've given me the chance to prove myself. I'm sure you'd like to drive yourself, the rest of the distance. And it would save any raised eyebrows if it's always the custom for you to be at the wheel."

He hesitated, then, "Thank you, it would be best, perhaps."

It had been a wise choice, for he blew his horn as they reached the valley floor, a gay, triumphant tattoo, waking the echoes that always lurked about these hills and cliffs. Dogs barked, horses neighed, and there was a great emergence from every building. There was real welcome on every face. Greta found herself thinking rather cynically, no doubt it was policy to make the chief feel honoured by all this. Then she caught herself up . . . she mustn't start looking for proof of the king-of-the-castle syndrome. Dad wouldn't have approved of that. He was all for abolishing resentment and prejudice. Though it was probably wise to remember his reaction to her appointment. Don't lower your guard, Greta Mountford.

Chapter Three

She gave him credit for the fact that he greeted Ursie first, even hugging her two or three times, though in any case, the others quite automatically parted for him to reach her, but he was entirely natural about it, kissing her on each cheek, then laying his cheek against hers. As she saw Ursie's blue eyes light up, and the hint of tears, she knew that there was indeed a strong bond here. She wondered if, in years to come, any of her own small pupils would remember her like that. Oh, how stupid. Ursie had been here for donkeys' ages. *She'd* be here just two or three years . . . if that.

The men's welcome consisted of handshaking and back-slapping, then he came to Jane, Buck's wife, who had her son in her arms. Caleb looked at him in amazement. "Now I know I've been away nearly five months! It's grown from a baby into a boy. I won't rush him, Jane. The others recognize me. I'm a stranger to him. He might be shy."

Jane laughed, "If only he was! He's the most oncoming of any we've had. But I'll put him down first." She stood the sturdy blond boy on his feet.

Caleb stared, "But he couldn't be walking yet – he's not a year old! Or am I mixed up?"

Buck said proudly, "He walked at ten months. Beat all the others hollow. Born with an itch to be up and doing, or to catch the others up. A real menace.

Todd lurched towards his father's boss, grabbed him round the legs, said, looking up, "Man!" then collapsed on to a heavily padded bottom.

"Great Scott!" said his awed father. "That's three words! Mum and Dad are the only others."

Caleb grinned, bent down, swung him up, said, "Glad

to meet you, mate. Good idea to put me next after your progenitors." He turned to Greta well behind him, and said, "I'm guessing you'll have to start this one off in the schoolroom at four, not five. Be prepared."

Ursie beamed. "I can see you're good friends already.

Caleb caught Greta's eye, and couldn't help a laugh. "I think you could say that. We stopped being polite and stiff with each other very soon after we met. And I was so impressed with her, I let her drive from Drumlogie to the Viewpoint!"

They all looked impressed except the youngest, Garth. "Well, I don't blame you. Though you must have taken her measure even quicker than I did." Then in an aside to Greta he said, "I think I've got my ute right, but I'd like you to okay it." Then to Ursie, "What time are you putting on dinner for the boss and Greta?"

The boss looked surprised, Ursie didn't. "Oh, you'll have plenty time, lad, it'll be an hour yet."

Greta saw Caleb look at Garth sharply, so said, "But have you got Lance to okay it?"

Garth nodded. "Of course. I promised you I would. He said he couldn't have done it better himself but that I wasn't to let on to the garage in Queenstown who'd done it, or he'd be offering her a job. But she helped me out yesterday when no-one else had time."

Caleb swung round on Lance. "Did you check it well? And you know the rules. Another check at the garage."

"It wasn't a major job. More a tuning-up. I took it up Miners' Cutting myself to make sure. And he knows it has to be okayed at Selby's – he's going in tomorrow. He's off till Wednesday."

Greta said quietly, "If Lance has checked it, you don't need me, Garth."

He looked disappointed. "But I want you to see what a good job I made of cleaning it up."

She looked at Ursie. "Do you want my help inside?" and hoped she did.

But Ursie just said indulgently, "Better go, Greta, he said earlier he hoped you'd be back in time to see it, and when I said why, if Lance had okayed it, he said, 'Because she

oohs and aahs better than any of you and *she* knows what she's talking about.'"

Ursie laughed and continued, "Just as well I've got a thick skin. Even after all the time Caleb's father taught me how to change a tyre and fill a radiator, all I know about a car is either it goes or it doesn't. Give me a horse any time. But don't go till you've got your overalls on, Greta. I know you. And Garth."

Garth said indignantly, "I'm not going to let her touch as much as a spanner."

"And I'll bet she'll lean affectionately over the open bonnet and listen to its every purr and throb."

Greta thought Caleb looked a little dazed. Poor man. Nobody whole-heartedly liked paragons. She went meekly for the overalls, slipped them on over her oatmeal trews, and emerged to hear the man she'd dubbed a curmudgeon, say, "Come on, kids. If we've got an hour, there's time to open your presents now. How about the big shed? There's going to be an awful lot of paper and packing."

The single men, as usual, were having their meal at the cook-house, where Ben, an elderly man who did the gardening on the estate, cooked for them, and fed them well. When she'd listened to Garth's engine, she said to him, "I just wish I could come over and have my meal with you guys but I dare not suggest it, I suppose. Ursie and Mr Armstrong have known each other so long, I'll feel very much out of it tonight."

Garth looked at her in amazement. "Never say that. While we never forget he's the boss, he only cracks the whip when he has to, but out of working hours he's just one of us. Besides," he looked at her curiously, "he'll be able to give you news of home. His last fortnight was spent entirely in London, I believe."

She said reluctantly, "I don't want to talk about London to him. It's a sore point with him."

"What? But he's written magnificent letters about it. Especially when he first arrived. Ursie passed them on. He called it a queen of cities. He was always mad on history, Ursie told me. Mind you, she is, too, so perhaps that's what

set him off. But no, he was revelling in being there. You must've got your wires crossed."

Greta pulled a face. "Then he liked London . . . it's only London's newspaper world he dislikes, and specially me. He thinks Murdoch and Theresa must have gone off their rockers engaging anyone from there, but especially a newspaper woman . . ." She realised she ought not to be talking like this, and said hurriedly, "Oh, take no notice of me, Garth, and not a word to the others. But he made it very plain when we met."

Garth scratched his head. "Well, it beats me. But not to worry. He probably met some angular, horse-faced female over there who wanted to interview him, and perhaps put his back up asking awkward questions, or was patronising about coming from Down Under. Can happen, and if it comes to the point, a few of our own interviewers aren't the soul of tact. Oh, perhaps they're told by the higher-ups to ask certain questions, but sometimes they have the cheek of Old Nick. And when he sees your performance in the schoolroom and out of it, he'll change his mind."

Greta felt better and said so, and went back to the house. She changed into an Elliot tartan skirt, pulled a thick green sweater over it and brushed out the hair she'd disparaged as straw-coloured, till it hung like a shining bell about her ears. She didn't think she'd let it grow again. Martin had liked long hair. She scowled at the thought then said to her mirror-image, "No, you don't! It looks too dressed up. You ought to look more school-marmish."

She screwed it back tightly, picked up one of the ruched elastic circles they called scrunchies, and forced the absurdly tiny ponytail into it. Much better.

Caleb Armstrong hadn't changed, was still in the casual things he'd worn for travelling in. He didn't look as if he was suffering from jet-lag. Probably thought that only affected lesser mortals! He was leaning back in one of the deep chairs at the hearth. The nooks-and-crannies-house had an excellent central heating system, all the houses had, run on oil, but there were fireplaces in every room, reminiscent of the days when they were all there was. Old Ben kept

this one, and Greta's, well supplied with logs, helped by the men who seemed to enjoy their forays into the more distant pockets of bush, hauling out great supplies by horse and dray. She was glad to see Ursie was dishing out in the kitchen just off this living-room; she had had all she could take of one-to-one conversations with this man today.

He rose, said, "Sit down and warm up."

But she said, "No, I'll give Ursie a hand," and went straight through.

She brought in some big vegetable dishes between thick white crocheted cotton holders that were the dead ring of some Evelina Klausner had used in Salzburg. The Austrian link was strong here. A red still wine reflected the dancing firelight, delectable odours rose from the steam vents. A white pottery urn held twigs of winter-sweet sending whiffs of narcissi-like fragrance through the house. Caleb Armstrong drew in a deep breath, appreciating it, and said, "That always makes me think the spring bulbs must be pushing up . . . if winter comes, can spring be far behind – and all that. Are they starting to show through on the graves, Ursie?"

"Yes, just an inch or two on Gretchen and Caleb's plot, in that sheltered corner." It was rather disarming. That was the worst of this place. Or did she mean best? The generations of yesterday seemed always with you. So that you stopped thinking of this as one man's kingdom but his by right. And it was part of the entire globe at that, all that mutton and wool on the hoof, needed at the other side of the world.

Ursie came in with a huge ashet, "Now up you sit, Caleb," and to Greta, "I knew he wouldn't want soup before this, it's his favourite but very filling. He always says, nothing needed to take the edge off the appetite if we're having the fatted calf."

He grinned, "That makes me feel as if I'm the prodigal son returning. Jove it smells good, and will put all those chefs' dishes I've indulged in, very much in the shade! Ursie, there's only one improvement I could suggest, and that would have been to serve it straight on to the plates in the kitchen and bring them in."

Ursie laughed, "You're just like your father. He hated carving too. but I'll not spoil you any more than your mother and I spoiled him. I think there's nothing looks nicer than the head of the house sitting at the head of his table and carving. So sit you down and carve that veal the way I taught you to."

Greta found herself thinking first that he was definitely king-of-the-castle, then next that he was being ordered round by his housekeeper. He sat down, and said, "Well, we'll have all the trimmings or I'll be in disgrace about that too. We'll say grace. It's well worth giving thanks for."

Greta felt as if the years had rolled away and she was hearing her grandfather say the very same grace, a short one because he had once said, "Such a shame to keep bairns hungry too long."

The short respite helped her regain her composure when the moment of acute nostalgia had passed. What a day this had been for sheer emotion!

Caleb picked up the horn-handled carving-knife and fork. "I hope you sharpened this well, Ursie. The trick in this is to make a most determined slash straight down so you don't disturb the stuffing. I suppose she told you what she was going to cook? It's a corner cut of yearling veal, pocketed and stuffed with two layers, one sage and onion stuffing, the lower one thick slices of Granny Smith apples." He put chunky slices of the veal on Greta's plate.

She said appreciatively, "Oh, thank you, Mr Armstrong."

"You're very welcome, Miss Mountford."

Ursie, surprised, exclaimed, "What's this nonsense? We don't stick to surnames here."

He said quite gravely, "It's tit-for-tat. She kept calling me Mr Armstrong all the way home. And twice in front of the men. Yet I noticed even the children call her Greta." His voice stayed bland, his eyes held no twinkle.

She rose to the bait. "I could easily get them to call me Miss Mountford if you'd prefer it. They did at first but it lasted only about three days, with all the rest making it Greta. I put it down to a casual Kiwi attitude and went along with it."

He handed her beautifully browned potatoes and *kumaras* and said with relish, "Life is going to be most enjoyable if you rise to all bait like that. "It'll be just like having Judy back home."

This time they measured glances. She tried to look impassive and failed. She almost grinned, and said, "Okay, Caleb. Now would you like to put this dish back for me? It's sizzlingly hot."

Ursie beamed on them as one who approves an armistice between bickering children. Greta knew wariness. This was too cosy, in fact, disarming. She didn't want anyone having ideas. Especially Ursie, and about a hidebound bigoted man like this. She would disappear as soon as the dishes were cleared. In all fairness he deserved his hearth and his housekeeper to himself after five months away. She was the stranger at the board. Thank heaven for that little sitting-room of her own.

Ursie glowed when Caleb said, "Never met up with a pub, even up North, who could make a Yorkshire Pudding like yours, Ursie."

It was very much a traditional English dinner, with deep-dish apple pie and clotted cream, a specialty of Ursie's, then coffee, biscuits and cheeses, some home-made.

He helped clear the table, and as soon as he put the last dish on the bench and Ursie started to stack the washer, Greta disappeared.

Her little register-grate was set and Ben had filled the log-basket. What heaven to have a place of one's very own. Unbearable otherwise. She'd continue with her letter home. She left a line blank after yesterday's diary-like entry and wrote:

> Today the king-of-the-castle came home, very much as I'd imagined him. Rough-hewed, a he-who-must-be-obeyed type. Couldn't expect much else, in a fifth-generation holding. But pleasant with his staff and especially the children. Nevertheless, I shouldn't like to cross him. You needn't fear I'll get above myself here. His profile is, as one of the youngsters let out, as craggy as some of the gashes in the cliffs

round here. Like Jagged Ridge. I asked the children if they ever named any of the features round about, that I didn't see why only the original miners and settlers should do it. I got them to put down geological formations that had never been named and they came up with some surprisingly apt names. One youngster, a boy too, said, "I wonder why we didn't think of this before. Like *Anne of Green Gables* that Mum's been reading us, only some of her names, wouldn't suit here, would they, teacher? I mean *Dryads' Bubble* and *The White Way of Delight*." I agreed, said, "That's why you should name your own." They came up with suitable and unsuitable names, but suddenly Bridget said, "There's one place that could have a sort of Green Gables name. You know that craggy heap near the Wai-iti where it cuts through on its way to the Shotover? Those curved rocks above the stream? The ones that nearly meet, so that the sheep jump over them easily? Well, they remind me of that Bugle Song you read us. . . . 'The Horns of Elfland faintly blowing.' We should call them that."

I was thrilled, one of the rewards of teaching. We'll do a study of Tennyson some time. Bits of it anyway. But I'm digressing. One young imp, very dear to my heart, Jason, grinned and said, "But we did name one feature. At least re-named it. The top of the cutting in Jagged Ridge called Hatchet Gap . . . we call it Caleb's Profile. But not when he's about." I said in what I hoped was a stern tone, "And don't let Ursie hear you either. I've not seen him yet but she told me he has a very handsome profile." I had to get them off the subject quickly, warned them not to make personal comparisons. I couldn't resist a look at the Gap later and found it had a grim, forbidding look.

Some they came up with were very apt. Like Purple Cleft, whose rocks have a purple veining, and Mossy Cascade, And on the Wai-iti, which means little stream, there are lots of places that could be named. I'm getting used to *Wai* meaning water, *iti* for small and *nui* for

big, which of course, you'll know, Mama, so please forgive me. Where they picked Maori names for them I got them to put the English meanings in brackets. There's a fine library here, with Maori dictionaries, proverbs, place-names, and with every vowel pronounced separately it's a very melodious language, isn't it? I very much like the way some words, quite short, can mean quite a long phrase, like Taieri, for instance, more properly Taiari, meaning The-tide-of-the-eleventh-night-of-the-moon. That makes me think it wasn't only in Laconia they saved their breath! It's the same with Gaelic, isn't it? Oh, damn and blast, look what I've done. I knew the ballpoint I was using was nearly used up so I put a new one handy on this old-fashioned fender that's got kindling boxes at each end, with padded tops, and these *manuka* logs are so fierce it must've over-heated and it's discharged its contents all over the page. I'll have to re-write this page but I've mopped it up and I'll finish the few lines while I'm in the mood. Fires save the oil-based heating here.

No more worries about me, my darlings, I'm healing-up. Love to you both, and to Dick . . . if he's home,

Greta.'

She turned on the radio. Saturday nights on air she found endearing . . . Mostly a request session. But she'd better get something to occupy her hands or for sure in this gorgeously comfy chair she'd go to sleep. It had been some day and perhaps losing one's temper led to exhaustion.

Time went by. There was a tap on her door and she called out, "Come in," and in came the king-of-the-castle!

Caleb grinned at her. "You didn't have to so markedly leave us together, you know. Come on back to the living-room."

She said, easily enough, "Ursie's idea, I suppose. Thinking I might feel out of it."

"No, my idea." He looked a little closer. "I thought you

said you weren't one for sitting in a corner with your tatting."

"It isn't tatting," she pointed out.

"No, I can see that. You're darning. Not your own, judging by the size of that sock. That doesn't come within the scope of a governess's duties. It's a farm sock."

She said, defensively, "They are not the single men's socks. They all have mothers back in Queenstown who do their mending. So I am not worming into their good graces by—"

He burst out laughing. "Like I said . . . you rise to the bait every time. My dear girl, I wouldn't dream of imputing such a motive to you. After our encounter this morning I know only too well that I'd be routed in less than sixty seconds. If you want to know, had it been the boys' socks, I'd have thought it a kindly gesture . . . saving Ursie the job too. It just looked so domestic I was intrigued. Whose are they, then?"

"Buck's mostly. Now Todd's on his feet, Jane is on the go all day, plus looking after the other three children. She's a wonderful mother. So's Myrna. But Jane said the darning was getting behind because every time she sits down at night to watch TV she goes to sleep and it so happens I find darning restful. Much more so than complicated knitting patterns or straining one's eyes over tapestry stitches. Tell me . . . why is he called Buck? Is it something to do with the rodeos and getting bucked off?"

He looked surprised. "No, just that most Rogers males get called Buck because long ago there was a popular cowboy hero called Buck Rogers. Way back in the Tom Mix era I think . . . would belong not just to our fathers' generation, but our grandfathers' I suppose. But the nicknames stick. Like Clarks being called Nobby and Rhodes being called Dusty. Buck has the sort of name that belongs to his Welsh ancestry. Gwillym. But he's been Buck so long, I doubt if he answers to it till he visits his mother. I'm rather impressed – with *your* erudite knowledge I couldn't imagine imparting common facts. That your sphere of instruction would extend to improving the minds of us yokels of the kingdom."

She gave him a withering glance. "I doubt if I could ever hold my own against the monarchy! *And* apart from that, all the men here, to say nothing of the women, have had to come to my rescue time and again because of my abysmal ignorance about high-country farming."

"Good, that'll stop you adopting any superior airs." He held out a hand. "Come on to the living-room. Ursie wants to hear all about the differences between life here and in Europe. You'll be able to correct any errors I fall into."

She spurned the hand, saying, "It may be a deep chair but I don't need help getting out of it, thanks."

She saw his mouth crinkle at the corners. "Taking me up wrongly again! I was only going to relieve you of the darning-basket so we don't have needles scattered all over the rug."

It was an interesting evening and Greta seemed to have a good grip of the market situations and problems he'd gained his award for. She certainly wasn't made to feel the outsider. He was adept at bringing her into discussion. Not at all, as he dubbed himself, "the horny-handed son of the soil, sitting in on the projects of world trade and affairs." It made him seem almost urbane, in fact polished. She could see the lecturer under the practical husbandry his father had taught him in the management of a big estate. By the time Greta had made the three of them a last cup of tea, she felt things were dropping into place. Also, that the next week or so he would be very closely concerned with his men, riding with them to the far distant boundaries, up to the huts where they often stayed overnight, going through accounts with Buck. It would be her job to keep the children well absorbed in their routine lessons that came into the Queenstown Private Bag Service fortnightly.

That was the way it developed, and she was glad she had kept to a rigid and efficient routine when the last lessons went off for that term, and the two weeks' holiday at the end of August and the first week of September came upon them. The men's wives included her in their usual pattern of taking the children into Queenstown, treating them to

trips up the heights in what they called gondolas, which reminded Greta of travelling up the cliffs above Lake Lucerne in similar contraptions, or up the Untersberg cable-cars at Salzburg. One day, two families plus Greta and Ursie, went on the *SS Earnslaw* up the huge length of Lake Wakatipu, to Glenorchy at the Head, the graceful steamer, of 1912 vintage but beautifully maintained, gliding gracefully over the sparkling waters, calling at the various old homesteads on the way, or letting trampers off to explore the inner recesses of the mountains. They stayed on board all day, returning late.

They went further afield too, delighted to show her the rugged contours of Central Otago, with its great outcrops of schist rock, sculpted by great extremes of heat and cold into fantastic shapes, with everywhere evidences of its sometimes lawless gold-mining days, even though many of the scars in tunnellings and banks of shale were gentled over by the encroaching and healing hand of nature.

Both Myrna and Jane seemed to have an abundance of hospitable relations where they could stay, and who seemed only too happy to include Greta too, and when relations gave out, they stayed in camping-grounds. A wonderful two weeks, and Greta nightly wrote home to her mother, describing it all.

Yet, it was odd to find how glad at heart she was to enter again the access road through the Wilderness, in the two station-wagons, breast the Jagged Ridge, and look down on the sequestered valley. She hadn't expected to feel quite as glad as this. Greta knew a faint apprehension as she felt this, and subconsciously analysed it. Was there danger in looking on any place as ideal? Once she had dreamed wistfully that she and Martin might, after they were married, seek out some lovely village within commuting distance of their jobs, where they could find a permanent home. It had led her into shutting her eyes to what was less than ideal. The lodestar of a home where one could strike roots.

They drove down the last mile, the welcoming sounds of a farm homecoming started, doors opening, hens clucking, a bantam rooster crowing . . . Ursie on her doorstep, Peter

Penguin, her black-and-white cat, wreathing about her ankles, and beside her, Caleb. What joy to come home to this, instead of to an empty flat with a row of pot-plants on its balcony . . . Greta stopped her analysing. She was glad to be home. Nothing more or less. She had her own domain here, even her own little garden surrounding it. It would be a busy first week, plunging into the start of the final school term, here in New Zealand.

It was the Saturday of that first week. Greta always made her own breakfast. She came out into the long passage, went along to Ursie's kitchen, entered it, saying, "If I'm wanted, Ursie, I'm at the far end of my garden under the schoolroom window. I want to weed the little rockery there. The bulbs are coming up in great style now so it's safe to weed in between. I just feel like getting my fingers into the good earth today. Everywhere is full of the promise of spring. Oh, who are you putting up sandwiches for, Ursie, is one of the families going for a picnic?"

"No, you are. I believe it was to be a surprise, but seeing he's not here – oh, here he is."

Caleb emerged from the larder. "For sure somebody's going for a picnic. In fact two somebodies. You and me. It's time you saw outside the boundaries of this valley. Out west, towards the Big Fellows. Garth's saddling up for us. We can go up over Jagged Ridge and across the plateau to Gretchen's Wood. It'll give you something to write home about. Then your parents won't feel you are immured in isolation."

She felt a warm glow of anticipation, said lightly, "I've always got plenty to write home about, but thanks. You persist in regarding my parents and background as cityfied, don't you? They've lived in far more outlandish spots than this. I think they envy me more than pity me."

The big man laughed. "What a girl you are for cutting men down to size. Well, me, anyway. You're really much more tolerant of Garth and Jock and Dexter."

"*They* don't need cutting down," she retorted. "They're such nice unassuming lads. Oh, I mean . . . er . . ."

The gray eyes danced. "Oh, for once our schoolma'am is at a loss for words. Not the most tactful utterance."

Greta said, "It's your fault. You *goad* me! You're a devil. And you know what I mean, anyway. It was your fault, the first time we met, or to be more precise, about thirty seconds *before* we met. You prejudiced me with your sweeping generalisations."

He guffawed. "But there shouldn't be a trace of that resentment left. I've apologized very nicely for that, haven't I? So I don't deserve a dirty slam like that and before my ex-governess too who is misguided enough to think me a nice guy, anyway."

Ursie spread mustard over the silverside sandwiches. "Not always, my lad. I'd like to spread a bit of this mustard on your tongue right now, talking to Greta like that. What *did* she overhear you saying in that thirty seconds?"

He looked unrepentant. "Oh, just that I'd got such a shock when Theresa told me she and Murdoch had engaged someone from London, as a governess for here, and that she was a newspaper woman to boot, I blew my top all unknowing that Greta was in the annexe off their living-room. Said I couldn't stand newspaper women. I lumped her with a few I felt nauseated with overseas . . . you know the type, news at all costs, even at the scenes of grisly accidents, or natural disasters. Real tear-jerkers. Or wringing the last drops of anguish out of the shocked and bereaved relatives of the victims, plus exploiting the private lives of politicians or the aristocracy. I admit it's the fault of the general public themselves, displaying an appetite for juicy stories and that same public has a *certain* right to know some things, but not all. So I let rip. Theresa couldn't stop me and the next moment the maligned governess fell on me tooth and nail. So, don't you think I was provoked, Ursie?"

Ursie sliced her sandwiches across with so much vigour she cut into her chopping-board. "I taught all the children not to generalise, so it looks as if I failed with you. It served you right!

Now I've put the flasks into the padded saddle-bags. It's still pretty cold nearer the ranges and once you get on to the

plateau, the wind blows right from the snows. You'll need your hot drinks. See you don't tire the lassie right out, and it's not her favourite means of transport, anyway."

Caleb looked astounded. "Isn't it? I didn't think anything would daunt our Miss Mountford: driving trucks over dangerous roads in Afghanistan, tuning an engine till it runs sweetly enough even for Garth, splinting the leg of one of the bantams, to comfort Arabella, to say nothing of taking something out of old Ben's eye. I've seen her in the saddle often enough. And it's necessary here. I don't like the kids unaccompanied and the mothers haven't always time. But if you'd prefer me to take you in the jeep, I will, Greta. Might have to keep more to the beaten track but we'd see most of what lies beyond the Ridge."

To her surprise she suddenly wanted very much to be off the beaten track. She said, "No, time I got over it. My preference is for engines. Not to be up high on something with a mind of its own. I'm better than I was, except I hate that moment when I put one foot into the stirrup and swing up. I always get a tremor then."

"Why then?"

"I feel the horse may move off before I throw my other leg up and drag me along with one foot in the stirrup."

He grinned, "I can fix that. How much time do you want to get ready? I've told the men it's our day off, but minor emergencies are always on the cards here so I'd like to be over the hills and far away before they start. You'll need a windcheater of course."

"Yes, sir," said Greta much too meekly, making him grin again. She was only too eager to get going. "The kids didn't make any plans yesterday that included me."

"Of course not," said Ursie comfortably, "they were warned off."

"Who by?" demanded Greta in genuine astonishment. She'd thought this a spur of the moment whim.

Ursie's time to grin. "By me, but it was Himself who put me up to it. Even told me exactly what to say. Which was: 'Now none of you young fry start cooking up any ploys involving your teacher. It's time she had a break from you.

Caleb's going to show her round the outer boundaries where she's never been.' He said it would sound better coming from me."

He scowled. "But he ought to have said not to let on to Greta. They may call this Caleb's Kingdom but it's sure ruled by a monstrous army of women! Right, wench, jacket and cap."

She pulled a face at him. "I'll just wear the cap later. One thing that does compensate me for riding is that I love to feel the wind through my hair."

The horses were brought up as they emerged. Caleb said: "Hold mine for me, Dexter. I'm going to help Greta up."

Dexter looked staggered. "Bit off-beam, aren't you, boss? She's the most independent dame I know."

Caleb's voice was dry. "Could be I know her better than you, even after the three weeks you had before I got home. We all have weak spots and that's hers. She's afraid it might move off before she throws her leg over. I'll take good care Dickon doesn't."

"I bet you will . . . wouldn't blame anyone for making the most of that . . . the boss sure gets the plummy jobs," muttered Dexter, then before he could be put in his place, a band of children emerged from the wash-house corner.

Greta said, "Now, what's this?"

Bridget looked guileless. "We thought we'd like to see you off. Have a good time, free of all of us. Where are you going, Caleb?"

He said slowly and deliberately, face deadpan, "Through the cutting by Caleb's Profile."

This had a strange effect on the group. They noticeably reddened. Then they looked accusingly at Greta. Bart put it into words. "You told! And you warned *us* never to say it in Caleb's hearing."

Greta rallied. "I did *not* tell him." Her indignation equalled theirs. "He must've heard one of you saying it!"

Caleb smiled maddeningly, "I didn't overhear it. Perhaps I've got this extra-sensory perception you hear a lot about. Ask your teacher what that means, next week, kids. Now, come on, Greta, up with you." He held out his hand for

her foot and tossed her up. He said for her ears only, "But I admit I hadn't wanted an audience."

He took his own reins, Ajax was already fidgeting, and they were off. They had only the narrowest part of the stream that ran through the valley to cross, so took the ford, not the bridge higher up. They let the horses drink the sweet pure water; Greta loved to see them blowing delicately on the ripples first to clear it of leaves and insects, then splashed through, heading up to the crags of Hatchet Gap, with a shared laugh as it came into view.

They had cantered only a short distance beyond when Caleb said: "Draw rein, Greta, and look your fill." It was said with an immense pride as well it might. He waved across the plateau to a distant hill that looked as if it rose from another valley there. It had the grey-blue look of distance. She said so.

He nodded. "That's quite perceptive of you. I'll take you there someday. There's a rough track winds round it to the other side and that gives you the best view of all. You can gaze forever from it. Not from the summit, that's too steep even on foot. But from three-quarters of the way up. Great perpendicular crags rear up then, in fact almost overhang, so can't retain snow. That feature was never named so Dad said we three children could have the naming of it." He paused for a moment. She heard him swallow, then he said, his voice not quite steady, "Alastair came up with the best one. That's why it's the spot I love best of all. He called it Infinity Hill. It was a great comfort to my father, later, though he only spoke of it once to my mother, Judy and me. He just said, 'It's so right for Alastair. It didn't seem possible when our son died that anyone as vital as Alastair *could* die. Especially when *I* was still alive. But in those first hard weeks since, I've thought of him saying when he named it, "Because the view from there goes on forever, beyond the ranges and out of sight, and you know the Tasman Sea is West of the Big Fellows, and Australia and the rest of the world beyond. Though it's all out of sight." And somehow, children, it comforts me, as if he's just beyond our vision. That his life isn't finite, never could be.' It was a great comfort to

Mother and to us. He never alluded to it again, in quite that way, but sometimes when we asked where Dad was, Mother said, 'He's gone to Infinity Hill.' It remains with me to this day."

He'd been looking ahead, between his horse's ears, but now he turned to look at her and the sun caught something that glinted like a dewdrop as it slid down her cheek. His response was warm and immediate. He reached out his right hand and she automatically put her left into it. He said, "Thank you, Greta. I appreciate that, for someone you never knew."

Her eyes sought his and held them. She said slowly, "But then as your father said, Alastair's spirit is still here. And your father's." There was silence between them and perhaps a momentary embarrassment because of sharing that poignancy. Then she looked towards him, though she ought to suggest moving on to relieve the tension, but she didn't have to.

He grinned mischievously, said, "You did say you liked the wind blowing through your hair, well, it can't, screwed into that absurd little knot. It's just a tuft, not long enough for a ponytail."

His fingers twitched off the green ruching of the scrunchie, and tugged it free. She took one hand from the reins but Dickon moved impatiently, and she had to return it hastily. He flicked his hand under her hair, loosening it upwards. It glinted in the strong sunlight. "That's the way you should wear it," he approved. "It was neither the one thing or the other that way."

Greta was aware his touch had disturbed her. She said crossly, "What made *you* a judge of hair-styles?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. That tuft has always annoyed me. As if it longed to spring out of that ridiculous frill. Now, admit it feels better!"

She shook her head impatiently and the cool wind from the pockets of snow on the heights, stirred her thick locks; they blew out and up then settled back into a curving bob between her ears and her shoulders.

He added: "And as for getting mad with me when I

called you a blonde and you said you were straw-coloured, you ought to see it right now. Under this sun it's pure honey-colour with a heavy swirl to it, loose like that."

She tightened the reins. "Time we moved on. This is a ridiculous conversation. You said you were going to show me the boundaries."

He was quite unrepentant. "You think I'm overstepping boundaries, don't you, Greta Elliot Mountford? Well, why not? The barriers went up between us with the circumstances of our first unfortunate meeting, but by now they were meant to be swept away."

But she'd dug her heels into Dickon and was away ahead of him.

Chapter Four

Greta hadn't thought the plateau would be so immense. It seemed to flow in golden tussock with a short green herbage under it, quite limitlessly, or if that was too fanciful, to the very distant rim of the plateau, beyond which, Caleb informed her, there were valleys and gullies galore, where this lion-tawny colour would dip down into the most shady pockets of native bush, evergreen and mossy, hard to believe in all this sun. Hard too to believe that not long before she had arrived, despite their saying it hadn't been too tough a winter, this had been under snow, with the men snow-raking to uncover buried sheep, and helicopters dropping feed.

They turned off the track that led to Infinity Hill, bearing right, and going more eastward. Here the rim of the plateau was much nearer, gashed into the tableland by a succession of shallow gullies. Presently they were heading into trees, the track following what Caleb called a creek. She laughed. "I'm used to that now. At first I only associated creeks with the sea as in England. I was too young when my parents left New Zealand to know these terms. Every time the boys said creek I expected a glimpse of the sea."

"Do you miss the sea?"

"Not now. I did at first but we seem to go into Queenstown often enough and Lake Wakatipu is so huge and so blue, it makes up for it. Besides, we lived in so many places that, apart from my training and the times Dick and I spent with our grandparents in Northumberland, when our schooling would've been interrupted too much to go with Mum and Dad, I didn't think of any place as home."

He looked at her sharply. Her voice had held a hint of wistfulness. "Did you long to be settled?"

"Yes. Despite all the richly varied experiences we had with our parents, I longed to put down roots. In fact, literally. I used to think it would be lovely to have a garden all one's own. We had when we were with Granny and Grandpa, of course, But there was no real continuity in our lives. Letting envy of other girls who did have, was a blunder in itself. It nearly led me into a wrong decision. Something that would've been the greatest mistake of my life. But out of that I grew closer than ever to my father. He was so understanding. I found that his undoubted gifts for making peace, had meant sacrifices for him too. He told me that he too kicked against the pricks till the words of St Paul came home to him . . . Paul saying, 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' When I told Ursie that, one night, she said she was glad I'd realized that about my father while he was still alive, that many people only find out how worthy their parents were when they are gone beyond telling. Ursie is a truly wonderful person, Caleb, isn't she?"

"She certainly is. I owe Ursie a lot. All the love that should have been poured out on her own children, was turned to good account with us. Children in these isolated circumstances, such as ours were years ago, grow very close to their governess."

They rode on in silence. She felt a little embarrassed that she had said so much, revealed so much of herself. But he didn't question her about the mistake. She was grateful.

They came to where the track led through the trees. "Don't be nervous. We always make sure there aren't any overhanging branches left too low. You'll like this spot, Greta. And where we'll picnic is called Gretchen's Glade."

She did like it. It widened out into a patch of greensward, through which a stream cut that looked as if it had been dammed to make a pool deep enough for diving. He said, "Most of the kids learn to swim in the shallow pool. This is reserved for the adults and if the older youngsters want to dive, they must have a grown-up with them to make sure there aren't any snags brought down by rain. That rock makes the ideal diving-board. But we'll eat here in this patch of sunlight. Caleb took a ground-sheet from his saddle-bag

then said, "Uh-huh!" as he shook it out. She looked at him inquiringly. "Ursie put this in." A twinkle lurked in his eyes.

"Why do you say that? What does it matter who put it in?"

His voice sounded solemn though the twinkle was still there. "Because it's the smaller one which means we'll have to sit close." She didn't reply. He added, "I didn't want you to think I had ulterior motives. You're never sure of me, are you?"

To her intense annoyance she felt the blood come up in her cheeks. She said quickly, "Don't be stupid. I wouldn't have thought that, anyway. You're a perverse devil when you want to be but not –" She didn't know where to go from there or why she was so sure he wouldn't take advantage of the situation.

He filled in for her ". . . but not a womaniser. Was that what you were going to say?"

She sounded cross. "No, it wasn't." She wished she could avoid that twinkle.

He said, mock-mournfully, "I really hoped you might have added: 'But not unchivalrous.'"

Suddenly she knew how to take this. She said slowly, as if considering it, "But it about fits the bill. Now can we stop talking nonsense and eat? I'm starving."

He laughed. "So'm I. Right."

She added, "And when we've finished I have a question to ask."

He grinned. "Should I be alarmed or intrigued?"

She didn't answer, just went on putting out the mugs on an adjacent rock with a beautifully flat top. He said, "When we were kids Judy said she was sure it was planed smooth like this especially for the Armstrongs, by the Ice Age." She thought it an entrancing idea.

They bit into their sandwiches, gnawed chicken bones, finished off with slabs of fruit cake and an apple. Then he looked at her expectantly, leaning nearer on one elbow. She felt slightly reluctant to begin. He gave her an opening: "Where this glade opens out over there, it's called Armstrongs'

Clearing. Has been ever since the first Caleb took over. I like to think of those Victorian children playing here . . . the boys, by their rare photographs, wore knickerbockers and the girls, even on a picnic, white embroidered pinnies. They were born to Caleb when he was past his first half-century."

"Armstrongs' Clearing?" she repeated. "I like it. And it brings me back to names. Now tell me how you could possibly know the children called Hatchet Gap Caleb's Profile?"

He rolled over and laughed, then sat up more erectly, looking down on her. "You are going to be mad with me but in any case I was going to confess today. That's why I said it in front of everybody. A way of leading up to rather caddish behaviour."

She stared up to him. "Confess? To me? What caddish behaviour?"

"Well, it was. You won't think me chivalrous when I tell you. Reading correspondence not meant for my eyes."

"Reading – what can you mean?"

"This," he said and pulled out an extremely crumpled sheet of paper from the pocket of his corduroys. Two lines etched themselves between her browny-gold eyebrows. "You *will* be mad with me. It was an intrusion on your privacy. But though I'm apologising I don't regret it. I couldn't resist it, didn't even try to once I caught sight of my name." He brought his knee up and smoothed the paper out on it.

Mystified, Greta gazed at it. A big foolscap page scrawled over with her own handwriting, and a messy blue blob near the end of it. The page she had spoiled the night Caleb arrived and had copied out again the next day, for the next mailbag to go into Queenstown. What *had* she said on that page? Oh dear . . . she turned and looked at him, but without indignation, "But how could you have got hold of that?"

He said simply, "Out of the kindling box at one end of the fender. When Ben hurt his back and I lit your fire. Remember? You wouldn't stay in the living-room that night because you said your prep was easier done in close proximity to the schoolroom library. I went ahead to warm the room up. I needed more paper. This was tightly screwed

up so I loosened it up to catch alight better. I thought it would be some schoolwork you'd discarded and was interested to see what it was. Then my name caught my eye and all was up. I succumbed. Go on, blast my ears off."

She was entirely reasonable, saying thoughtfully, "I don't see how you could have resisted it. I'm sure I couldn't have."

He let out a sigh of real relief. "I can't believe my incredible luck . . . you actually understand. I thought you'd either fly into the sort of passion you exhibited at our first encounter, or else go all self-righteous on me."

Her eyes met his. "Your luck is due to Dad. I've seen him refuse to take umbrage at some insult, probably an intentional one, because *his* feelings mustn't be allowed to cause a further rift, and I do understand this. I'd despise anyone who purposely pried into private correspondence, or business ditto, like reading someone's bank statement, say, but to come across it like that, explains it all. And, thank you for letting me know you'd read it. You didn't have to. Though I'm wondering what I did say. I was probably still hot about what I heard you say to Theresa."

Her eye fell on the first line: "Today the king-of-the-castle came home. Very much as I had imagined him . . . He-who-must-be-obeyed . . . pleasant to the staff and especially the children, but I shouldn't like to cross him." Her eye travelled down the page and she was aware he was reading with her. When she came to the re-naming of Hatchet Gap, laughter bubbled up within her. It was infectious. "I could've said a lot worse," she pointed out, "given the way we clashed at the Rectory. Give me credit for that."

He nodded. "Very wise of you. Didn't want your parents to know you'd met up with the legendary wild Colonial Boy, I suppose. And you did say I had a very handsome profile."

She said hastily, looking away from his features, "*I* didn't say it. I said to the kids Ursie had said you had."

"Oh, yes, that's right. You hadn't met me then. How very disappointing."

She said, "You're expecting me to declare it *is* handsome. Well, I won't. I don't believe in pandering to vanity."

"How could it be vanity? I don't know a more forbidding rock-face than Hatchet Gap."

"No, but worth seeing what's behind it, and though at first I deemed you the most intolerant, infuriating man I'd ever met I admit there's more to you than that. Just as there's sunlight through the Gap."

He chuckled. "Got yourself nicely out of that, didn't you! Not a proper answer at all, just giving the devil his due. Fair enough."

"But one thing I must ask you, Caleb. Why confess you'd read that letter? I need never have known." For once this big man looked disconcerted. So she looked more closely at him. "It seems to be the time and the place for speaking freely . . . so cough up!"

The letter was still under his hand on his knee. He looked down at it. "You went on and finished it, Greta, so you could just copy it in the morning. I read on. I'm not forcing any confidences. What has happened in your past is private to you but if you *can* tell me, I'd feel better. It's nagged at me ever since. This ending . . . speaking of healing up. Theresa only said you'd suffered a bitter loss. I thought a physical loss. Bereavement. Someone you loved dying. Only I've thought since how peculiar to use the word bitter. Mainly because since getting to know you, and the sort of life you've lived, I've thought your particular philosophy wouldn't have room for bitterness . . ." Into the succeeding silence he added, "But if you don't want me to know, I shan't be huffy."

"I don't mind you knowing – now," she said.

"Thanks." He reached across her and picked up her left hand. "I suspect you lost a fiancé. Two or three times I've noticed a paler mark on your ring finger. Was it?"

She said without self-pity, "Yes. We should have been married this month, no, last month. I – it meant a lot to me to think I'd have a settled home at last. I imagined it was ideal. We were going to look around for a cottage in the country, not too far out of London. I wanted my children, if we had any, not to have the partings we did. But he was killed in the English spring."

He tightened his grip on her hand. "Words are inadequate, I know, but I'm sorry."

She lifted her eyes to his. "Depends how those words are said. A lot of very insincere ones were said to me but worst of all was that my replies were insincere too."

The dark brows above her came down as he narrowed his eyes, searchingly. "What can you mean?"

"Well. About the first part, the insincerity was because they suspected it mightn't have been all it seemed, on the surface, the second part . . . about feeling insincere in replying, especially to written condolences, it was because I had made up my mind to give Martin up as soon as he got back to London. But – but I didn't get the chance. He was killed on the roads at the very time I was thinking how I would say it. Oh, I was glad I somehow managed to keep my own counsel about that – it would have been even tougher on Martin's mother had she known the reason why he was on that particular road. As it is, we are still friends. We always were. I didn't tell my parents for a little time. Keeping it to myself made it easier to endure. But while he wasn't a journalist, he worked for the same newspaper I worked for, as an accountant. A very fine firm, no matter what you think of newspapers."

Caleb made an impatient movement. "You can forget that – and—?"

"I had to get away. I'd had all I could take of the sympathy and – well – you see Martin had a passenger that day. She was a lovely girl and a friend of us both. She was killed too." Greta stopped, swallowed. "They had been weekending together. It seems that unlike me, some had suspected. This was later, after the first outburst of sympathy and horror died down. For a reason I've never expressed to anyone, not even Mother and Dad, I felt guilty."

"Guilty?" It was jerked out of him. "Oh, do you mean he suspected you were going to break it off and he perhaps lost his concentration driving? If so, you mustn't. That's not fair to yourself. You couldn't know anyway. That's letting your imagination run away with you. Oh, sorry, you said you couldn't confide in anyone. Sorry. Forget it."

She took a deep breath. "I believe I've gone too far not to tell you. It can't hurt him now, or his mother. Or her family. You'll never meet. Perhaps I got very introspective in the ensuing weeks. Analysed myself pretty ruthlessly. Felt it must be some fault in me if he could stray when our wedding date was fixed. I came to the conclusion that I was out of gear with my own contemporaries. Because I'd been away so much living in tense situations . . . I did all Dad's reports, you see. Bigger issues were on my mind than most girls in their twenties. Not so casual. And I harboured too many dreams about settling down. Too much of an idealist. A settled home was my lodestar. I didn't think enough about the man. Not that I had realised that at the time.

"Looking back I suppose he was rather patient with me. He asked me, before we were engaged, to move in with him. He had a flat in London. I refused. So we became engaged. He said quite tolerantly that I'd never got used to being in the fast lane, that I'd never struck out on my own. True up to a point. Although I spent the years in teacher training away from home. I suppose I kidded myself he repected me for it. It's made me a little cynical. I don't want to be cynical. This other girl was quite a lovely girl. A laughing, joyous sort of creature. So, looking back I don't blame him. She was more his type. I haven't a doubt she'd have married him, had he asked me to release him, only – and this *is* cynical – Dad had a quite influential position, and I couldn't help but be aware Martin liked that. I couldn't bear the thought he'd been unfaithful to me so near our wedding. Wondered what he'd be like as a husband. Well, I suppose they could hardly be together at his flat, so the weekending in the country was their solution. That was why they were away from town when – when it happened."

"But you can't . . . you *shouldn't* feel guilty about that. It wasn't your fault they were on the road, away from the city. But why couldn't he have waited for you to marry him?"

She looked down, her hair swinging over her face. He waited. She looked up, "Please try to understand this. Till now it has been just something that crops up occasionally . . . sometimes when I can't sleep. I think that he came to

the conclusion I didn't feel a grand passion for him. And that was true. I came to see that one shouldn't think more of one's need for a home than of the man in question. That it was marrying for a way of life. I think he'd come to the conclusion I was a cold creature."

"Oh, hell! I never heard anything more absurd. No-one who can get into the sort of paddy I saw you in at our first meeting could possibly not have good red blood coursing through her veins, couldn't possibly be frigid!"

At the mention of their first meeting it struck both of them as ludicrous. "It was hardly the same sort of passionate encounter," said Greta, bubbling over.

He said seriously, "No . . . but it is an indicator, surely." He thought for a moment, then said, "Look, are you really sure it was as serious as it looked? There may have been a quite harmless reason for him having this glamorous girl with him."

She sobered up immediately. "I didn't rush to a conclusion. That they'd been away together. It was thrust upon me: I did freelance articles for my paper. A sort of roving commission due to the fact I travelled such a lot with Dad. Never a hint of what he was concerned with of course. Just articles on out-of-the-way beauty spots. Some in England itself. But in an emergency I got called on to write up a few historical facts about a stately home where a charity Fete was to be held. Martin had recently told me a friend of his had offered the use of a cottage for our honeymoon. I was rather touched by that, as I knew his preference would have been for Portugal or Spain. The week before he'd been sent west of London attending to the books of one of our agencies and had said he'd not be back before Monday night.

"I'd finished my assignment and found I was in the neighbourhood of the village. I thought I'd like to see it. It was a really glorious day and over the fence a woman was busy in her garden. I asked her if by any chance she had the key. An ill chance as it turned out. But for that I'd never have known about Martin and this girl. Would have not had disillusionment to cope with, just grief. She said what a pity I'd not come sooner, that a couple had been there for the

weekend but had gone. Said it wasn't their first time. A nice quiet couple. That they'd been there before, that she was quite a looker. She mentioned their first names. Martin and Virginia. Even said the girl suited her name, had red hair. I felt sick. She hadn't a clue what she was doing to me. I rather feebly admired her garden. More to stop her noticing I'd got a shock. She asked if I'd like some flowers. I thought she'd never be done picking them."

She stopped as memory rushed over her. "When I finally got away I turned into a side-road to get hold of myself. Couldn't face the traffic till I did. I made up my mind I'd ring Martin at his flat that evening, say I wanted him to take me somewhere where we wouldn't be interrupted as something important had cropped up. I'd tell him it was over and I'd give him back his ring. But I didn't get the chance. He and Virginia were killed before they got to London. It was terrible for his mother and for her parents. I couldn't add to their pain. I staggered through the whole incredible ritual of mourning. Answering letters was the worst. His mother assumed Virginia had been on an assignment and that Martin had been told to pick her up. One or two had doubts, I knew. But in Dad's work one learned to put a cork in indiscreet talk. Sometimes the sympathy of dear friends who assumed I had a broken heart nearly destroyed me."

She hadn't realised Caleb still had her hand in his. It was a natural gesture when someone told you a sob story. He rubbed his thumb across the back of it. Then he broke his silence by saying: "And just when you had weathered the worst of it and had the sense to seek new scenes, a new job, I arrived on the scene and in my crass ignorance bludgeoned your feelings all over again."

She took a moment to think about that, then looked up. To his great surprise she actually grinned. "If I'm honest, Caleb, it was a complete relief to lose my temper so absolutely. I'd been so controlled for so long, watching every word so that no-one would suspect it was much more than a tragic bereavement. I'm ashamed to admit it now, but I thoroughly enjoyed bawling you out."

He gazed at her unbelievingly for a moment, then laughed.

"You are without doubt the most astounding girl I've ever met. I have this awful feeling I ought not to be laughing at all, after hearing what happened to you, but dammit, I can't help it. You've taken away from me the guilt I should be feeling."

She put out her other hand to lever herself up and said, "Well, it's cleared the air, hasn't it? For the first time I feel I can look at it squarely and . . . carry on. Back to life as I live it now. You just the boss of a big sheep-station and his present governess, far too busy to look back with anguish."

He rose with her, said, "I'll go along with that except for one word. *Present* governess. You've fitted well into the routine. You're the kind the kids need here. Even if you think of me as you wrote at the head of that page, as the king-of-the-castle and he-who-must-be-obeyed."

She really did look abashed this time, put her hand to her mouth in a rueful gesture like that of a child caught out. He said, "I think the name of this place counts against me. It has a despotic sound. Don't link me too realistically with the name of the station. I'm only a fifth generation farmer. I bear the first settler's name but even he, tough and all as he had to be to wrest a living from what was then a harsh, inhospitable land, was anything but a despot."

She turned an astonished face up to him, "Then how did it come by its name?"

"You know there was some gold mined here long before any sheep grazed on the tussocky hills? Yes? Well, it was never a rich vein here. It soon petered out but there was enough to keep one old prospector going. His needs were very basic. He just continued washing a bit of payable dirt out of the Wai-iti. He bought a few sheep off Rees' station in Queenstown, and a goat. So he had milk and mutton. Made his own bread. Built that old stone shack under the hill. We still store a bit of hay in it. By and by he grew vegetables, a few fruit trees, the forerunner of our orchard. A great old chap if all the stories about him are to be believed. Do you know what his surname was?" He looked at her expectantly.

She shook her head. "Why? Is it important?"

"Yes. Because the name was Kingdom. Later, when my forebear bought the land from the Crown, old Isidore Kingdom had only his claim, but people still referred to the valley as Kingdom's. It pleased him no end. Gave him an identity, I suppose. He was a great worker. Always lived in the stone hut but was very much one of the family. He's buried in our Little Acre. The first Caleb and his wife lie next to him. So he never had to leave his kingdom. After he died people began to call it Caleb's Kingdom and I inherited the name and the reputation that inevitably went with it. *And* as no doubt I should admit, the effect this isolation has upon me . . . or the isolation we once had. In fact I think it would have that effect on anyone, who has to make the rules and lay them down. Basic ones of safety. So I'm strict. I hope I don't overdo it. At times it's not been easy. We've got a splendid team at the moment but it hasn't always been that way. One or two undesirable characters, one or two wives not suited to the terrain. Or even mischief makers. Sometimes our very circumstances make and mould us. Not that that's any excuse for being a despot."

He stopped, seemed to think for a moment, then said, "I knew that reminded me of something. My grandmother was an inveterate keeper of scrapbooks. To read through them is like having a progress map of times and conditions laid out before you. I was just a kid in the schoolroom here when I had to do a project on the years following World War II. Mother said I'd find bits and pieces relating to world conditions then, in Gran's scrapbook of that time. They were mostly clippings cut from newspapers. I got some good stuff out of them, because points of view were those of the actual times, not just formulated by hindsight. I recall that one earlier still reported that infamous speech of Mussolini's where he said that war was to men what childbirth was to women, and here was the editorial comment on it. But what occurred to me just now seems to have stuck in my memory: I think Queen Elizabeth said it after her father's death but before her crowning. Several commentators had predicted we were on the verge of a great reign like the first Queen Elizabeth's. Our present Queen, young though she was, turned that down.

She said: 'Elizabeth Tudor was a despot and she ruled like a despot.' That has quite a ring to it. She didn't want to be associated with that. So, remember that, Greta Mountford . . . this may be known as Caleb's Kingdom, and I may have struck you as a man of rigid ideas at first hearing, but *I'd* rather my property was known as Armstrongs' Valley. That takes in all the forebears . . . even Alastair, who didn't live to inherit. Not just me and the first Caleb."

"I like that," said Greta, "I like it very much."

They untethered the horses, and went home at a leisurely pace.

The calendar of the year moved on at a steady pace. The estate seemed to catch up with the improvements Caleb was making after his months away. Greta loved it all. The continuity of it satisfied that deep longing within her. Even allowing for the changes that had come over the years, you were always conscious that the generations before you, before Caleb II had patterned their lives on the same lines, because as you clasped the rough rails of the sheep-pens and five-barred gates, you were constantly wondering whose hands had fashioned them, who had added the features of the arch that led through to the stables – (one of Burrough's guests had vowed it was a Norman arch); who had erected the tower on the stable-roof that housed the massive clock, relic of the days when not every station-hand had as much as a pocket watch. It was marvellous that it still kept such good time, that it still struck the hours.

"Not really so marvellous," Caleb informed her. "With due respect for its age, I get an old watch-maker up from Queenstown once a year to overhaul it."

"Well worth doing. I like to see it out of my sitting-room window. Chester Burroughs remarked on it when he came over for the day a couple of weeks before you came home. He's frankly envious of the features here. He sees them all as tourist attractions, of course." Her voice took on an indignant tone. "He even said, 'There's such potential here but a dyed-in-the-wool sixth generation farmer can't see it, of course.' I'm afraid I took him up on it, said it would lose half

its attraction if it became some sort of dude ranch. Lose its individuality. The family tradition. Ben had been filling me in, you see, in the evenings he could spare me, to familiarise me with things I needed to know. Mostly with regard to the children here. It's so much a part of their life too. The way they identify with the estate. They use the word 'our' so much when speaking of it. What great kids they are. I'm just one of them when we have our games after school, yet they accord me full status as a teacher the moment we get back in the classroom."

He said, "That in itself is a compliment to you. And exactly why it's so much better to have a governess than just have the mothers overseeing lessons." He grinned. "As soon as you're in the classroom you assume an unmistakable air of discipline. It even abashes me. I wouldn't dare take liberties with you then. It's a sort of she-who-must-be-obeyed attitude, as you once so unkindly wrote about me."

She retorted: "And which you so caddishly read! I know I excused you but don't push your luck too far." They were into the stables by now. "What are we going in here for?" she enquired.

"I wanted to ask you something. Get more privacy in here. I want to ask you to go with me to the Stags' Head Dance at Burroughs' Lodge, Chester's putting on next month. It's really something. Tourists come from as far away as Alexandra, and loads from Arrowtown, Ludwigtown and Queenstown. From Drumlogie too."

She was aware of a rush of pleasure. It had been solid grind the last two or three weeks. She didn't want to show her feelings so she said consideringly, "I think I'd like that. I did love Giles and Lucinda, and it would be marvellous if Murdoch and Theresa come too. And Buck and Jane took me to see Nat and Letitia at the Wilderness one day. How surprising to find Letitia was the beauty specialist at her husband's father's big drapery store. I'd love to further acquaintance with them too."

He looked at her, and shook his head. "Not the most gracious acceptance. You'll be my partner at the ball because

you'd like to see *them* again. You could have bruised my ego."

He saw a dimple cleave the brown cheek nearest him. "I'd have thought your ego was healthy enough not to need nurturing."

"Well, try it some time. You might be surprised at how I'd react." He came a little nearer. "But if you'd rather not go with the boss, if you think it might cramp your style, I'm sure Jock or Dexter would leap at the chance. I told you I wasn't a despot. You don't have to agree because I'm the one on whose payroll you are."

The brown eyes flashed. "I didn't say yes because I thought it expedient. I don't work that way. I never have. It comes of freelancing, I think. Only—" she stopped. She'd nearly said, "Only because I didn't want to sound too eager." What on earth had come over her? She wasn't exactly a gauche teenager.

"Only—?" he prompted.

"You devil!" she said. "All right, I'd love to partner you. End of discussion."

He moved in closer. "Thank you, lady fair . . . much better." He bent his head.

As she realised his intention she stepped back, and hissed at him: "Idiot! We're too near the doorway. Ursie's been at the window for at least five minutes. She has the look of wanting to attract our attention to call us for lunch."

"Well, what of it? I don't have to ask my ex-governess's permission to kiss my current governess, do I?"

"I've no idea. She might be used to you kissing all the governesses in between for all I know."

"Tongue like a shrew," he remarked. The knock came. He waved in acknowledgement, and manoeuvred her adroitly further in. His grip made sure of no resistance. The vertical creases in his cheeks deepened. His mouth lifted at the corners. "It *is* better without spectators."

His lips were cool and hard at first, then warmed. She was aware that magic was feathering her veins. Perhaps first kisses always had this effect. She didn't know . . . had she ever . . . ? He lifted his mouth from hers, but didn't release

her, had a quizzical look in those dark grey eyes. Then, "Thank you," he said, "that was quite an experience."

As they moved into the sunlight he said, "We must ask Ursie to come too. She used to be a first-rate dancer in her day; it was poetry in motion to see her with her Hamish. She never lacks for partners."

"I know. We went across to a sort of impromptu hop there with the guests who were occupying the chalets, the week before you came home. Chester said to me she was the best dancer there. It's funny, he's a tough businessman in many ways, never fails to see an opportunity and seize it, but he can be vulnerable. He has a soft spot for Ursie. He told me so."

Caleb lifted a quizzical eyebrow as he looked down on her by his side. "And Chester Burroughs, the big entrepeneur, told you that? In spite of his being such an out-going man and a good mixer, which is necessary, I've always looked on him as being reserved about his personal life. Fancy him needing a confidante! But then you're a disarming creature. Don't I know it! I seem to have told you about things, discussed them with you, that I haven't discussed with anyone since Alastair died. I never feel self-conscious about quoting poetry, for instance, or talking about the other years here or up at Lincoln. You'll have to tell me if I overdo it, bore you."

"You don't bore me," she said, "in fact you remind me, in that, very much of my grandfather. He used to recall these things as we rambled over the moors."

"Now, that really cuts me down to size," said Caleb, and they went in laughing.

Chapter Five

She hadn't expected Caleb to spend as much time in the schoolroom. To be sure he always asked if it would fit in with her timetable. It was necessary, of course, at certain problem times with the computer section. He seemed to have a conscience about these youngsters being denied the wider scope and fellowship of the classroom and playground. She wondered if it had anything to do with what he'd felt when he was sent away for his secondary schooling at John McGlashan College in Dunedin . . . perhaps he had found out his own limitations and deficiencies and put them down to what had been even greater isolation then.

She confessed as much to Ursie one night when Caleb was busy in his study-cum-farm-office with his head shepherd, on the books. "Ursie, tell me quite frankly: has Caleb always spent as much time as he can spare from the station work on projects in the classroom? Is it because apart from having been born in New Zealand, he feels I'm a greenhorn about life and affairs here? It worries me."

Ursie laughed. "Anything but. No need for worry. He says you're the best we've had of late years." Greta felt an inward glow at the praise. Ursie went on, "I think, dear girl, you see him only as the natural heir to the estate. He wasn't destined for it, you know. He loves the land, yes, but from the time he went to John McGlashan, it was evident he'd set his horizon much further away than that rim of mountains beyond the plateau. He's not just his parents' son, you know. He's very much the grandson of his paternal grandmother, who moved in very academic and musical circles in Christchurch before she wed Robert Armstrong. The Correspondence music lessons are excellent, but our children here get a

bonus in having Caleb give them extra-curricular time in that section."

She looked at Greta keenly. "What a conscience you have yourself, lass. No doubt inherited from those stern Elliots of the Border. Never feel that anything extra he does for the children is because of any inadequacy in you. He was all set to become an agricultural lecturer, you know. He was only one year behind Alastair and we hoped for long enough Alastair wouldn't succumb. Lincoln is so near Christchurch, you know, that he was enjoying much the same rich musical culture his grandmother, Bethea Macrae, had known, but he gave it up willingly even though his father wouldn't have asked it of him. But not without cost. So don't fash yourself or think that he's in anyway usurping your position. He's glad you've got such a good contralto voice. He told me so. But he can give the ones who are inclined that way, that extra something that puts them in a class of their own.

"Spending a few odd hours in the classroom satisfies something in him but the land is in his blood too. When he comes in from long hours in the saddle or on foot when mustering, you couldn't doubt he was in his element."

"Thank you, Ursie. That puts my mind at rest. I have recognized and admired the vigour and inspiration behind his touch on the piano and no-one could help knowing what an inborn gift Bridget has. There's a great rapport between her and Caleb."

"Aye. Makes up to him for not having children of his own, I think."

Greta added, "I'll never forget the sense of wonder I felt when I realised that a child of ten could have an appreciation of Bach. It was the first time Caleb asked me to sit in on her lessons."

Ursie looked shrewd. "You'll realize why – apart from the fact that you're the governess?"

Greta nodded. "Yes, though I was naive about it at first. I very stupidly said, 'Wouldn't you rather have her on her own?' Caleb was frank. 'Not these days. Pity in some ways but it's a safeguard in others. For both Bridget *and* me. When we were all kids my sister Judy had a special comradeship

with old Ben. Roamed everywhere with him on horse and afoot. But I don't give any of the children lessons on their own, boys included. Bachelors of thirty-five are sometimes regarded as doubtful characters, you know . . . Get me?' I did, of course, said promptly, 'Sorry, Caleb, that was plain stupid of me.' Although the fact I hadn't tumbled to it right away was a tribute to him in itself. It would be impossible to doubt his integrity. He's a tough *hombre* – as he has to be – but . . ."

Ursie nodded, her needles revolving rapidly round the sock she was knitting for little Todd. "Exactly."

A few nights later Caleb and Greta were alone in the living-room. Ursie had got a call from Jane's mother in Queenstown. They were old schoolmates. Ursie had said: "We'll talk for ages. I'll go round to my room. Caleb, when you hear me speak there, replace the receiver, will you?"

He put his book down, complied, then went to a bookcase built into the far alcove by the fireplace and picked out a fat black book. It bulged because it was full of clippings. He came across to her, put it on her lap, and said, "I'd like to show you this. You were very interested the other day when Bridget and I were marvelling over the fact that in his last years Bach's sight failed, yet he carried on, with his second wife, Anna Magdalena, who was a soprano singer herself, acting as his amanuensis."

Greta nodded. "I liked the way it made Bridget instantly identify with him. Also her second fervent thought which was, 'Gosh, I wonder how she found the time with all those children . . . and no washing-machine!' Then you went on to the later, even greater, tragedy of Beethoven beginning to be troubled with deafness at only thirty-two and continuing on. I've always grieved with both of those but never more so than that day when I heard a child of ten understanding the anguish caused."

He nodded. "That links up with what I wanted to show you. This is one of Gran's journals. She recorded this between the two world wars. I actually heard Gran once telling my father about the wonderful conductor of

the Christchurch Harmonic Society of those days, Victor Peters. He'd been grievously wounded in World War I. Had a very devoted wife, I believe. Gran said they lived on Mount Pleasant overlooking the estuary of the Avon and Heathcote Rivers. They took a trip to Germany in the thirties and came back with some music never before performed in Christchurch, that had been written in memory of Bach. There it is, written in her own words that night she heard it, back in her digs as she called them. See . . ."

Bethea Macrae had written, '*It's something I'll remember all my life, the voices and the orchestra dropping to almost a whisper on that last line . . . "and though he sleeps, his heart's awake."*'

"I remembered it instantly when I first discovered young Bridget had a passion for Bach. That's true immortality, isn't it? Remembering someone born over three hundred years ago. The heart still awake."

Greta read it, was moved, looked up into his intent eyes. They heard the sound of the telephone being replaced. He took the book off her, got off the chair-arm, and looking back at her over his shoulder as he slid it into its place, said with a whimsical twist to his lips, "What romantic conversations we have, to be sure. Mostly about your grandpa and my grandmother!"

Ursie came in, said comfortably, "Jane's mother said Buck is taking the whole family in on Saturday and were thinking of taking you too, Greta. She also said she thought you wanted to explore Queenstown on your own, but told me to be sure to tell you that you'd be very welcome to spend it with them if you changed your mind. She'd mean it, too."

Greta said, "I'd like a break completely free of all schoolma'am cares for once, to say nothing of a spell from answering questions. But I'd love to go in with them." It *would* do her good. She was becoming besotted about this place, simply didn't want to be away from it. She recognized the danger signals. Her desire for a settled life had led her astray once. She'd see it didn't happen again.

* * *

Greta had had a wonderful morning, had roamed along the foreshore, watched the funny little black teal diving to the shingly bottom and scuttling along under the water, had wandered among the lovely trees and features of the Government Gardens, had strolled through the fascinating Ballarat Street where the sounds of many languages could be distinguished, where once only miners' tents had been scattered, with grog shanties and much lawlessness; had done quite a bit of shopping, including some choice souvenirs for her old-fashioned quarters that she loved so well. Now she decided she'd treat herself to a ride up in the aerial gondolas to the Skyline Chalet with its Million Dollar View and have a gourmet luncheon. It wouldn't be as crowded now as later in the season.

She stood on the viewing platform for some time, looking out over the almost cobalt waters with their innumerable bays tucked into the folds of the mountains down towards the Kingston end of the dogleg lake, the sharp peaks of the Remarkables opposite that reminded her of the Dolomites. She felt hungry now, went in.

She revelled in being able to eat up here without the necessity of making small talk, and the fare was delicous. She felt as if God must've fashioned this lovingly, gentling the jagged grandeur of the Remarkables by spreading this incredible blue beneath them, and indenting curves of bays to enhance it even more.

She had reached the coffee stage when an exquisitely-featured woman approached her table and said: "I've been told you're the new governess at Caleb's Kingdom. I used to be there long ago. Would you mind if I joined you for a little chat about it if you've time?"

"Do, I'm in no great hurry. I'm not being picked up by the head shepherd till four, but I got a little tired of shopping."

"Really? Is it ever possible to tire of that?"

"Well, I'm afraid I did today. I'll order you some coffee. Would you like biscuits and cheeses with it? They've an excellent cheeseboard. You would? Good."

By now she knew the staff at the Skyline Chalet very

well. It arrived promptly. Greta thought this woman looked about thirty but could easily be thirty-five. Beautifully high cheekbones, perfectly curved lips, dark hair enchantingly clustered about an oval face, the very bluest of eyes.

"I'm Erica Godsby but I used to be Erica Chayne. You may have heard of me."

"I'm afraid I haven't. Though Ursie has mentioned other governesses. When were you—"

"Oh, I wasn't a governess, I was engaged to Caleb. I had an aunt in Queenstown. Did he never mention me? I know Ursie wouldn't."

That sounded disparaging to Ursie. Or was she imagining that? But perhaps they hadn't hit it off. Greta said lightly, "I've not been there long. Not long enough to sort out former relationships."

"I'd been told you were a newcomer, and that you came here from London but got here while he was away. He's certainly gone places since we – since we parted. So has the estate, the Kingdom. Much easier of access now. What a stroke of luck for Caleb when Chester Burroughs had Big Slip swept away so he could build his hunting lodge. Now *there's* a man not impervious to change. A tycoon. But in spite of his having motels all over the North Island, he finally settled here in the wide open spaces he loves, and the whole world comes to him. Not like these stick-in-the-mud fifth and sixth generation sheep-farmers, who resist all change. Think there's no other life and expect others to take it too."

Greta was beginning to dislike the trend of this conversation. She chose a morsel of Tararua Colby and a triangle of the New Zealand blue vein cheese she'd grown so fond of, then said crisply, before biting into one of the wafers and thinking rapidly that perhaps the former inaccessibility was the rock on which Caleb and his fiancée had split, "Well, fortunately the easier access for the Wilderness and the Kingdom came and a road could be put through from the lake-road to Glenorchy, but most around here have recognised that this snow-prone country is tough on lambing ewes and they go in for wethers

only these days, and beef cattle, and on quite a big scale, into deer."

"I suppose so, and of course with the Lodge so handy, with all its tourist facilities, there's more to keep womenfolk there now. I mean the chalets that take the overflow, bring the world to Caleb's door in a way that could never have been visualised before."

A chuckle escaped Greta. "He could well do without that. Caleb feels he owes Chester a lot so he tolerates it. It's just a gentleman's agreement, I believe, but they're both men of their word." She added: "He also puts on special days when those who want to see New Zealand farming in full swing, are allowed to come to watch shearing, etc. Actually, full swing is hardly the word. Caleb thought me a right ninny when I imagined that sightseers came in when the shearing gangs do. He said, 'Good heavens no, think of the strain that would be on the men having to watch their language to that extent! We keep a chosen few and the shepherds and I shear them. And the women put on a marvellous spread, outside of course.' I've learned a lot since I came up here. Still have to, it seems. They do the velveting of the deer in December. I love the sight of the deer in their high-fenced huge paddocks. They are poetry in motion."

"Yes, must be lovely. I don't suppose though, that you'd have considered coming here had it been as isolated as when I knew it. Even so, I don't suppose he'd have painted it in its true colours . . . I mean as the back of beyond, as he must've done when he met you overseas."

"Good grief, we didn't meet overseas. The Gunns at Ludwigtown are connections of ours. We had once met at Salzburg. My mother was born in Ludwigtown. My parents thought I needed a change, so got in touch with the Gunns, thinking Murdoch might have a teaching position available. I trained as a teacher. But this turned up when I got here. The Kingdom had lost their governess. She married rather late in life. Suited me, no waiting to have qualifications assessed and so on. I'd never heard of Caleb before that. I'd always wanted to see where Mother was born. The Gunns sprang this on me. And when Caleb turned up he was furious.

Thought they'd gone out of their minds to engage someone from London. But they knew that I'd been in spots more rugged, more lonely . . . my father is a mediator and I went with him most of the time to act as his secretary. But it took time to get Caleb used to the idea that I welcomed the solitude."

Why she was confiding all this, she didn't know, just that she somehow felt it wise. She felt a certain wariness. Not for herself, for Caleb. Perhaps it was sheer curiosity about a former fiancée. Anyway, this woman was married. She wondered where the husband was.

Erica Godsby smiled disarmingly, "If you don't think it a nerve and if you don't mind telling me, why did your parents think you needed so drastic a change?"

"I don't mind. Quite an ordinary reason. Getting over a bereavement. The trauma of losing my fiancée. He was killed in a motor crash. Everyone treated me with so much sympathy, I knew I just had to get away. Start a new life."

The darkly blue eyes looked as if they might be bright with unshed tears. Bright, anyway. She said, "I'm so sorry, but I won't say more than that. I know a little of how you feel, though I had years of a happy marriage behind me. He died a year ago. Our one regret was that we had no family. I think seeing you have honoured me with your confidence, I should give you mine. I've got Caleb on my conscience. I wanted to come up here to satisfy myself that it wasn't what was reported to me . . . that he couldn't get me out of his system . . . that he was . . . is . . . a one-woman man. I'd feel so much easier if he could forgive me."

"Forgive you?" The words seemed jerked out of Greta. Then she took a pull on herself, said hurriedly, "Look, perhaps you should think twice about telling me. I mean Caleb mightn't like it. Men don't like being talked over. I mean it's between you and him."

"Do you mean you honestly aren't curious?"

"I've got no reason to be. I'm just governess to the children on the estate. And with my father in the position he is, I was taught to be reticent."

The exquisite lips took on a straighter line. "I'm going to

tell you just the same. If I don't you'll hear it from someone else now that I'm in the area again. It doesn't reflect well on me, I admit, and if you hear it second-hand it could sound even worse. No-one guessed at the true state of my feelings. I did what I thought was best for Caleb and for me, despite the way I loved him. You're used to this easier access so perhaps you won't be able to judge, but if a girl thinks, in fact knows, she can't take the life, she ought to let him know it. Better a broken engagement than a broken marriage."

"Yes," said Greta stiffly, "I agree there."

Erica went on, "I stayed up there some time to sound it out. Ursie and Caleb's mother did their best to sow doubts in my mind. Caleb was only twenty-four then, but already a strong character. They didn't succeed in putting doubts in *his*. So they turned all their guns on me. And succeeded. I knew I couldn't take the life. My parents had insisted I took an extended holiday at the Kingdom to try it out. It took a lot of courage but I managed it. My boss's nephew had been most considerate to me, letting me have the extra time though he admitted later there was some self-interest in it. He was offered the managership of the Wellington branch and proposed to me. Please believe me when I say I knew I could make a success of that sort of life.

"Caleb had told me that when he came to Dunedin next he hoped to be able to fix the date of our wedding. I knew I'd not be able to resist him. Well, I told Cliff this, but he wanted me at any price so . . . well, we married secretly, and because I knew there'd be hell to pay when Caleb arrived – he'd already rung to say he wanted to see me urgently, we didn't come back from our honeymoon. Went straight to Wellington from the Bay of Islands. I wrote Caleb a letter, sent it to my parents and asked them to give it to him when he arrived. It estranged me from my parents for a little while, then they accepted it."

Greta knew a sharp pang for the young Caleb, that was almost a physical pain. Just as she had when that woman had mentioned Martin and Virginia. A stab of betrayal. She couldn't help it. She said, "No wonder you have a conscience about it. Anyone would feel guilty about doing

it that way. It ought to have been done face to face. Not having a clandestine wedding when you were supposed to be still engaged. It would have hurt less that way."

"Yes, but I wouldn't have been there to see it. I'm too sensitive." She shrugged. "I can't expect other people to understand. I suffered deeply over it. And it did me out of a traditional wedding. I've always regretted that. Poor Cliff felt guilty too." Then a suggestion of pleasure flitted over her face, widened her lips reflectively, "But of course it had its compensations. Cliff knew I had loved Caleb dearly. But not his way of life. So he was never completely sure of me. It kept him on his toes. Never hurts to have a man unsure of you, keep him guessing. Don't you think so?"

Greta was blunt. "No, I don't. Oh, you don't want to fall into a man's lap like a ripe plum but once you are engaged to him or married, you ought to be able to give with both hands. Otherwise you'd remain immature."

There was a sigh. "That was what Caleb loved best about me. He called it my little-girl attraction of sheer enjoyment in small things. It was such a change for him from the grim life he lived up there. It can be grim, you know. I believe you've just lived there at the tail-end of a winter that got all its snow over at the right time. Despite that new road it can still be isolated with deep snow. Can't be negotiated even with chains, so my aunt tells me. Living in London in winter at least you have the compensation of the theatres, the shops. The isolation can get even the men down, to say nothing of their wives."

Greta thought she'd better disabuse this woman of some erroneous idea. "I've spent less time in London than you imagine. My first year in teaching was in a Scots village in the Highlands. But apart from that, not all Dad's missions were spent in the capitals of the world. I've lived with him and Mother in some real hellspots. Not only isolated but hostile and terrifying. Some were lovely, like Norway and Finland and Russia; snow added to the beauty there. The snowsports were marvellous; but I'll spare you a list of the glamorous places. It makes me sound like a jet-setter, but

even in those, one often knew fear. The threat of perhaps being taken hostage.

"But a few places were cruelly barren and inhospitable as regards the elements and all of them beset with problems. People there, however, were mostly lovable and warm-hearted, appreciative of what he was trying to do, that is, apart from what Dad called the Awkward Squad." She took a deep breath, remembering, and added, not without malice, which surprised her, "So even if I'm not as old as you. I'm sufficiently mature to cope with all that Armstrongs' Valley may produce."

Erica said shrewdly, "Perhaps because you know you could terminate it any time you like and go back to the cities and the bright lights of the world."

Like a flash of lightning that lights up a whole landscape the truth was revealed to Greta . . . no, she *couldn't* leave it. She would never want to. Because she . . . because she loved that valley so!

She was immensely glad that at that moment the waiter appeared at her elbow and asked if they'd like something more. She said crisply, "No thank you, Noel," and rose. "I see you've got a large tour party coming in." She stood up, moved a little away from the table and said, "It's been very interesting. I don't know anything at all about Caleb's callow youth. We all make mistakes. I'm just someone on his payroll. By the way, I shan't tell Caleb or anyone else I've met you. I was taught to hold my tongue. And don't regret giving me your confidence. One does sometimes when one has done it on an impulse. It's nothing to do with me." Or so she thought.

When she got down to where the Rogers were picking her up, they said to her, "You're in luck. The boss is in town. His car is more plutey than ours. Gives you a break from the children too. He went to Jane's mother's place to let us know. He *said* he had to come into town unexpectedly and you're to go to the tourist office at four-fifteen. It's not far." Jane wore a knowing grin. Greta was sure she hadn't imagined the emphasis. Inside her a little glow of

gladness was bubbling to the surface. What an afternoon this had been for unfamiliar sensations.

Caleb was waiting on the pavement. "Good. I hoped you wouldn't turn me down, because we've got an invite. Lucinda rang after you'd left to ask if we'd go over to Drumlogie for dinner tonight from the valley. I said you were in town but that I'd pick you up. Have you had a good day? Will it make a nice end to it?"

"Very nice. It's been a glorious day. I had lunch up at the Chalet and it will be lovely to—"

She was interrupted. "Don't, Greta! Don't for Pete's sake say what you said when I asked you to partner me to the ball, that you'd like to see Lucinda and Giles again."

Laughter had its way with her. She said mock-humbly, "I was only going to say it would be nice to go home a different way."

"You exasperate me. Why couldn't you have said: 'I'd love to go to dinner there with you, Caleb!'?"

The dimple quivered. "Well, I thought that too," she conceded.

"Much better. In you get."

Once in she said presently, "It's very interesting going up to the Chalet. You get more out of the view every time."

"See anyone we know?"

"No," and she had an impish thought of how surprised he'd be if she tacked on, "but I did meet someone *you* know: Erica Godsby."

The Drumlogie gardens and hillside were crowded and Lucinda, Giles, and Robin and Stella had decided to entertain them privately. "We were very naughty," confessed Lucinda. "We went over and helped ourselves to all their choicest dishes. The children have had their tea and Robin and Stella are going to tub them and tell them their stories so you can have a dander with us round the garden after our meal. The diners at the restaurant usually dilly-dally over theirs so there's a good chance we'll have the white garden through the moongate all to ourselves." It sounded idyllic.

Caleb seemed to think so, didn't say they must get away, which at this time of year on a road like that would be

understandable. So it happened that the early spring dusk was falling when they made their way, the four of them, through what they called their United Nations' garden because it represented as many of the countries of the world to compliment their guests, with careful planning as to what varieties could survive the harsh winters.

They threaded through a larch grove, where the filagree of bare branches, fascinating in itself, was beginning to break out into green leaf-buds, and rounded a small conical hill. They gained the ridge on the other side of that, where in the spaces between the mountain stones that formed the path, low-growing sweet herbs bloomed sending up subtle fragrances as they were crushed, and all manner of humble little alpine plants and mosses crept over the bare rocky ground and made it a thing of beauty.

They turned a bend and there was the moon-gate, a perfect circle on the high stone shelter-wall. They came to a full stop, held by its beauty. Even lacking a moon it was entrancing. The sun, still not quite set, behind the westward mountains, lit the surface of Lake Wakatipu, turning it to silvery blue.

Giles said, "There's a legend that what ever scene is framed by moon-gates at the full of the moon, becomes for that beholder, the one place beloved over all. Wildly exaggerated, of course, but it certainly came true for us, didn't it, Lucinda?"

"It sure did, even if I thought for long enough I could never live here."

Greta looked a question.

Lucinda said, without emotion, stating a fact, "Because I came here simply to trace a half-brother. I was the child of a bigamous marriage, which took place in Singapore and had no idea that my half-brother's name had been changed when *his* mother, Stella, years after my father had deserted her, married Rob, so Chris's name was changed to Adair to disassociate him from the scandal that ensued when the bigamous marriage had been revealed."

There was a short silence, broken by Giles. "You might be surprised to hear it spoken of so casually, Greta, but it's

common knowledge here. What Lucinda hasn't told you is that she came here with a very altruistic motive. Her father repented when he contracted a terminal illness, had inherited money and wanted his son and his daughter to inherit. She only knew her father had lived in this area. Lucinda wanted to in some way contrive that her half-brother could have it all, and steal away. She too, bore *her* step-father's name. But Stella loved her before she knew, and more so when she suspected it before any of the rest of us did. But Lucinda, unknowing, was planning a getaway, leaving me in the lurch, so to speak." He sounded mock-indignant. "But by sheer good luck I'd shown her the moon-gate at the full moon and the spell worked. I chased after her on true romantic style and the lady was mine."

Even in that half-light they could see Greta's eyes were starry. She felt a little embarrassed by their regard, said hastily, "It's like something in a book. The happy ending. Take no notice of me, I want to step through."

They did, into what Giles said was his father's night-garden, made for his Marguerite by her somewhat inarticulate husband. "At least," amended Giles hastily, "it so happens that the rest of us have the gift of the gab, so he seems that way. It took years to create, long before Drumlogie was ever a guest-house. He had to put in all those little pockets of richer soil between the rocks first, and scoured great heights to get the little pale mountain flowers to take hold here . . . see . . . quite a few clumps of edelweiss. All the flowers are white, to show up in the darkness."

Lucinda said softly, "And of course, everywhere, white daisies for his own Marguerite. He didn't really need words, did he? That's why our daughter was called Marguerite Rosamund. Rosamund was the second name of Stella's daughter who died in infancy. It was my second name too, both of us called for our father's mother, whose heart he broke. Dear me, what a morbid subject. But now, everyone, save my father, has a happy ending."

It wasn't till Caleb and Greta were on their way home in the gathering darkness that he said, "Giles exaggerated when he said everyone knew Lucinda's story. I think it was

meant as a hint that you could easily find happiness again. She told me a week or two ago that Theresa had told her of your loss and disillusionment. Sometime, perhaps when you are on your own she'll tell you she was engaged to someone else, up north, before she came down here. That chap fell in love with her best friend. So she would really understand. I can imagine Theresa telling her that it could be good for you to have a friend away from the Kingdom. Theresa wouldn't tell everyone."

"I know she wouldn't. I'm very grateful." She thought to herself Lucinda might have had a double motive. She was bound to know how Caleb's Erica had run away with someone else. Someday Caleb might tell her about that. She hoped he would. He could have done so the day they had ridden part of the way to Infinity Hill, but despite the rough start they had had, she knew by now he had a rare sensitivity of other people's feelings. Might have thought it would seem rather like trying to cap her story, or minimise it.

Suddenly it was dark and over to the east a great bar of cloud was hinting at a rising moon behind it. They drove mostly in silence, a companionable silence.

The night took on a special meaning of its own, harsh outlines became blurred, the rocky outcrops across the tussock were gentled. Caleb broke the silence, matching her thoughts as he said, "Wonderful how many moods the same landscape can engender. Almost as if, on certain nights, one is seeing it for the first time." A pause, then he said, "Or does seeing it in different company from usual, make one feel that?"

The tone of his voice did something to her in the light of the knowledge that had come so suddenly to her that afternoon. She wanted to respond, to lay her hand over his on the wheel, but she mustn't. That knowledge needed analysing. It could be another case of being attracted to a man because he lived where he would always live. Oh, it hadn't been really like that with Martin. It was just that he had offered her the chance to make a home. And this so far transcended anything he could have offered, there was danger in it. She said lightly, "I expect it's because

you know this new chum is seeing it for the first time by night. We all love showing other people special places."

"You under-rate yourself, Greta Mountford," he said. "Put it down to a mood, a whim, if you like."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean I could have turned back to Queenstown after our visit to the moon-gate and gone home by the easier road but I had a special reason for this."

She ignored that. It could have been eerie in all this darkness, not completely black, but dark enough to give an impression of complete solitude with only darker patches indicating the density of hills rearing up. Occasionally clumps of trees were moving blotches against the twin swathes of light from their headlamps that swung like searchlights with the twisting of the road.

Caleb said, "Under a full moon and brilliant starlight it would be possible to drive without lights but only a fool would risk it on a rough mule-track like this. That's why I like walking at night at the Kingdom . . . the darkness is more friendly then."

She wondered if she would ever be asked to accompany him on one of the rambles. In the present-day world there were few places that would be safe enough. Solitude had its compensations. She kept her eye on that faint radiance where the moon must rise sometime. She thought regretfully they'd be home long before it rose high in the sky.

By the time they climbed the narrow defile, she knew that to be true and felt an out-of-proportion disappointment. As they came to the crest Caleb drew in, and stopped. "The whim I spoke of," he said, a smile in his voice. "I don't see why the Drumlogie people should have a monopoly of legends. Let's start one here and now. After all a moon-gate is contrived. This gap in the defile was wrought by nature since the dawn of time. No doubt in the very early mining days some weary prospector might have paused here. In fact would have to, after that long pull, whether on foot or on a horse or a mule. The animal would need to draw breath too and who's to know, the miner might have looked down a valley that must always have been beautiful in contour

and trees and cascading water, and hoped he'd never have to leave it. Like old Isidore Kingdom, and, later, the first Caleb and his wife, who lie beside him. I'm sure to them it was the one spot beloved over all."

Greta was enchanted. "Why, Caleb, a comment like that is sheer magic in itself. Even without a full moon. We can hardly wait for that moon to rise. It takes its own time."

"Why can't we wait?"

She looked east where the cloud now showed as bars of blackness with just edges of silver. "Because it's just inching up."

"And who's to say we can't wait as long as we like? Sometimes, girl, time is a tyrant that robs us of our best moments. So many things to be done urgently. But not now. Not tonight. It's ours."

Silence. She wished she wasn't so acutely aware of him. He said, "Want to stretch your legs? Feel the night air on your cheeks to cool them?"

She was a little uncertain of herself, of him. "What makes you think they need cooling?"

His chuckle had an unrepentant tone to it. "Because I feel the need of cooling down, myself." She didn't know how to answer that. He sensed it, said teasingly, "Come on, forget I bawled you out when first we met. Stop resenting that, stop making me want to eat my words. Isn't it a waste of a night like this to still feel that way? Trouble with this place is that we're always surrounded by people, rarely alone."

He was interrupted by a peal of laughter. "Oh, Caleb! A place like *this* – described to me only today as the back of beyond. You sound as if we were in the middle of Piccadilly!"

He caught her arm as they walked across the track. "Wretch! You know what I mean. In London you can ask a girl out, a dinner for two, the theatre . . . even a stroll in Hyde Park. It's hard to find a place for two here. Someone's always wanting you to look at his blasted engine or Ben wanting you to see how his potatoes are coming through. Or like the other day the kids wanting to show you the kingfisher's tunnel in the bank by the Corduroy Bridge.

And I'd wanted to show you the first bluebells. Suppose it takes hours, you're still going to see my valley through the gap by moonlight, and tell me if Walter Peak through the moon-gate could be half as beautiful."

Her tone matched his for lightness: "That's sheer partiality and you know it." Then, looking down, "But even just by starlight nothing *could* be more beautiful. See . . . all those lights showing where the estate houses are, and the men's chalets scattered through the bush. They're such happy homes, Caleb. A happy kingdom."

"Yes, I've been lucky in my men, and their wives. The women need to be the right calibre and happy with their husbands to compensate for the hardships."

"It's not only that. They're lucky in you . . ."

"Could you ever have imagined saying that to the man you overheard, then confronted, in the Rectory living-room?"

Laughter swept them both. She sobered up, said, "You said a few minutes ago it was time we forgot all that."

"So I did, and I could think of much nicer things to talk about."

"Me too. I *used* to believe in first impressions. I'm not sure of myself any more. You must've thought me a very cocksure person when I kept being disparaging about the hazards of your roads, putting you down every time you opened your mouth."

"Yes, that's for sure, but you altered my opinion of you when you asked if I'd take over for the descent. You didn't go the whole hog at putting me down about that incident in the Afghanistan Hills."

"How, Caleb? I told you where it was. Called it more dangerous."

"Yes, but not *how* dangerous. And you could have."

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"You didn't tell me your father's leg had just been injured by hostile tribesmen. That you were lost and surrounded. Young Bart told me. I went into the schoolroom after hours one day and he was turning the big globe. The old out-of-date one. Was quite suprised when, in answer to my query as to what he was looking for, he said

it was Afghanistan. 'Where Greta and her father got ambushed.' That your father had got lost, that because of some booby-trap that had been part of a local feud, you'd turned a corner and ran slap-bang into it and nearly overturned but your father's leg got gashed."

She said, "I hope you didn't think I was setting myself up to be a heroine."

"I know you weren't. Bart has that faculty you get in the very young of repeating something word for word, almost, not putting his own interpretation into it. He said: 'She was telling us we must always be prepared to see the other side of people's behaviour. Not to regard them as enemies. She and her father were scared at first then realised it hadn't been meant for them; that these wild-looking men were gaunt and hungry and were really sorry, even if her father had only a few words of their lingo. She got the first-aid kit out and they helped her pull the gash together with plaster – it had to be stitched later – and she bound it up. She persuaded them to clear the road-block away and got out the provision-box and shared it with them. And her dad persuaded them it was no way to resolve this feud, that it could go on for years, and when they found he had no intention of reporting the incident, they all shook hands.'"

He paused, "But what I liked best, Greta, was that Bart said you told them they weren't to just remember it as an exciting adventure but as an example of there being more good in angry people than we often think. That appealed to me. I like a philosophy like that."

"It wasn't my philosophy or even Dad's. I heard a minister say once that it was a mistake to make an illustration in a sermon so exciting that the congregation remembered only the the story, not the lesson it was supposed to teach."

"But you took his words, made them yours, and passed them on. It really must have been frightening, though, and especially for you. You'd have all sorts of womanly fears to contend with. I hate to think of that. Women are at such a disadvantage in situations like that."

She nodded. "But it didn't happen."

He said, "Women must often have to contend with such

fears. I mean even wondering about being alone in these wild solitides with me."

She turned and faced him. "Oh, no, not you." There was sheer astonishment in her voice. "You wouldn't coerce any woman against her will."

"Thank you, Greta. Then we can get back in the car and it won't matter how long the moon takes to rise."

They walked back, he opened her door, then went round and got in himself. But they didn't buckle their seat-belts yet . . . He said, mischief in his tone, "I really didn't park this car at the right angle for moon-viewing. Move a little closer."

She kept a matching mischief in her own voice. "You could, of course, move the car."

He chuckled. "I'd have to move the chocks and chock them again. Why bother when it can be done like this?" He slid an arm about her, drew her around so that her vision slanted across him. "I've been meaning to ask you, Greta. You said once your grandmother did a bit of writing. That that was where you got your itch to write from. That she'd had a book of poems published. Did you, or your brother inherit that? Writing poetry. Or your father?"

"No. I've never written a poem. But Dad wrote some. Though he was a late-starter. He only began to do it when he fell in love with Mother."

"Then I expect when you fall in love, you'll write poetry too."

"I doubt it." That was an odd thing for him to say. He knew she had been engaged. But then he knew and she knew, that it had been more a longing for a home of her own.

Presently he said, "There are more interesting ways of passing the time till full moonrise, aren't there?" And with only the starlight to show her, she caught the twinkle in his eyes. He moved his now cool, slightly rough cheek against her smooth one, momentarily, then even the stars were blotted out as he began to kiss her.

Dazedly, unwillingly, she found herself thinking that Martin's kisses had never stirred her like this, and she realised that she wanted him to kiss her very much. Caleb's

lips grew a little more demanding but not too much. She liked that. It showed that sensitivity again. He'd spoken of it already. She was a girl alone with a man in immense solitudes. Not the sort of place where you could get out and walk home. She was aware of his feelings, but they were chivalrously disciplined. She could have drawn away at any time and been released. But she didn't want to be released.

The pressure lessened, he brushed his mouth backwards and forwards over hers, said, "Thank you, Greta, that was very sweet . . . quite an – er – interlude. It suited tonight." He seemed to wait for her to say something. She couldn't help responding to that nuance of a question.

She said, "Yes. Thank you for keeping it that way . . . and now, Caleb, the moon is just freeing itself from those clouds. Don't you think it deserves our full attention? It's what you drove all this rough way for."

"Was it?" he said, and laughed, but they watched it appear, a great burnt orange ball, shining directly on them. Words were superfluous now, so they gave it the tribute of silence. They watched as it sailed rapidly higher, paling a little as it did, till it lit up their valley, silvering the snowy peaks further away, picking out here and there a flash of pure crystal from the miniature waterfalls of the gullies, striking gleams of glass from the darkened windows of the houses below, even from those in the old shearing-sheds, that were such utilitarian buildings by day.

Afterwards, he switched on the engine, the lights, after removing the chocks, began the long, steep descent. At the foot he turned off the engine, not to disturb those who slept, and they coasted into one of the garages.

They went on through the garden to the darkened house. He stopped at his bedroom door, switched on the passage light for her to see her way to the quarters, turned and reached for her hands to draw her to him for a goodnight kiss.

She didn't know what made her draw back. He stood quite still, said, "Am I making the pace too hot? Is it too soon? I keep forgetting it's only a matter of months

since you were committed to someone else. Sorry. I'll slow down. Goodnight." He flicked her cheek with one finger. "Sleep well."

She said, "Thank you, Caleb." She knew perfectly well it wasn't thoughts of Martin that had made her draw back. It was a swift recollection that this was the day she had found out about Erica Godsby who was now a widow. Who was very beautiful, and had undoubtedly come here to meet Caleb again. He might not know his former-fiancée was now free. So it was just as well Caleb felt it was too soon after Martin. She wondered when he would find out about Erica.

Chapter Six

Greta knew that life wouldn't stay on the romantic level of the night they watched the moonrise but a few days later she found herself thinking it was ironic that it should plunge into such exasperating depths of the commonplace.

Most of the time she found teaching these highly individual children mainly joyful, doing the thing you liked most of all, without the hurly-burly of normal school-life with its attendant administrative difficulties, staff problems and personalities. For sure you had a timetable to keep, with the return of the lessons, the radio sessions, the not inconsiderable pitfalls of the mixed stages and ages, and the apprehension that was caused from knowing about the imminent visit of an overseer from the department, though she'd been told they were very understanding, and the children seemed to be doing well. Nevertheless it was as if the devil himself had got into the classroom today.

Bart and Bridget Fairbairn had arrived in definitely hostile mood, not just normal brother and sister bickering, but sullen and unco-operative with each other. Kirsty, their older sister, tried to mediate, which pleased neither, and Rowena, the older Rogers girl, had cut her finger so badly, it was obvious she couldn't attempt any written work today. Even seven-year-old Arabella Rogers, who normally lived up to her name (which meant, "easily entreated"), had announced she wasn't going to answer if anyone called her Bella today! Greta backed her up, said, "Quite right. Arabella is far too beautiful a name to be shortened," whereupon Jason said:

"But it's one helluva mouthful, just the same," and had to be reprimanded for language in the schoolroom.

This was the signal for some of the others saying some

nicknames were better than given names and were proceeding into giving examples when Greta brought them up with a round turn by saying, "Enough of that! I can detect delaying tactics in sixty seconds flat," and she wore such an expression even Bart was cowed.

But everything that could happen to disrupt the normal routine did. Play-break restored the atmosphere somewhat but they were no sooner settled down, when, without his usual knock, Caleb erupted into the room, saying, "Someone has left the fowls' run-door open and Ben's going mad. They're at his seedlings . . . out everyone of you and help round them up!"

Greta couldn't help an exasperated sigh but Caleb took no notice of her and disappeared after the kids, who, with the exception of one of them, welcomed this diversion. Greta bowed to the inevitable and followed them. The usually placid Ben was breathing fire and brimstone and Jason wore a hunted look that could only be interpreted as guilt, so evidently he'd been the one on poultry duty this week. The said poultry lived up to their reputation by being even more scatty than usual and as part of the vegetable garden fencing was a live hedge, the hunting-out was prolonged. At last they were rounded up but not till Ben had become quite demented, shouting, "Mind how you go! You're like a herd of elephants trampling. You're doing more harm than the chooks . . . oh . . . look at that bl-blasted bantam . . . she's got in again. All you wretched kids get out of here. I'll get her myself . . . and when I do I'll ring her flaming neck!" At which Arabella set up a howl of anguish.

Greta clutched her, said, "No, he won't, love. By the time he catches her he'll have regained his temper."

Ben, enraged still further by this remark, scowled ferociously and said, "I will not! When I look at that row of silver beet trampled and pecked, I'll do it and enjoy it!"

Greta whispered in Arabella's stricken ear, "Don't say another word."

However Bart said it for her and unfortunately Ben heard it. "Silver beet!" said Bart with loathing. "*I* won't feel sorry. Now if it had been strawberries, I might have worried!"

Caleb caught Bart's shoulder and turned him towards the gate. "Out of here, young man, or you'll get *your* neck wrung. Scram . . . I'll chase her into the orchard."

He got the gate firmly shut, picked up Arabella, and whispered, "It's all right. I'll lure her out of the trees with some wheat and lock her up. Now, back to lessons and not a peep out of you the rest of the day or I'll see you get kept in, and it could just happen that would spoil a surprise that *may* arrive today. If not, tomorrow. No, I'm not telling you what. But you'd better behave."

He glanced at Greta with the suspicion of a grin, and she felt most relieved. She liked a man capable of losing his cool, but of getting over it as fast as this. He added, "Though more correctly it's for your governess, but I'm sure you'll be allowed to share the fun of it." He waved his hands at them in a dismissing gesture . . . "Now off you go, through the schoolroom garden, and *wipe your feet*." It could be said they stood not upon the order of their going, Greta with them, till a groan from Caleb stopped them in their tracks. They turned as one.

He was gazing in horror and fury at a large drum of paint standing on a garden seat Greta loved to sit on at twilight when the children were back in their homes and no longer her responsibility.

"What is the meaning of this?" Caleb demanded. The children and Greta rushed to look. A large piece of thick porous paper, in a burgundy red was floating on top of the white paint which was rapidly turning a violent pink. He snatched it up, held it over the grass where it dripped evilly and roared: "How did this get here? And what is it?"

Rowena stared at it with horrified fascination. "It's *Lord Nelson!*"

Caleb glared at her unbelievingly turned it over. Between streaks of heavy oil-based paint the once debonair Admiral peered at him. Rowena gulped, turned to Greta, and said, "I'm sorry, teacher, That book'll never be the same again. I must've had it in my left hand when I ran."

Caleb roared, "What's your *left* hand to do with it? Look at my paint!"

Rowena said, reviving with spirit, "Because I can't use my *right* hand for writing today. So I was sticking *Lord Nelson* together, instead. It's a very old book and must be preserved. At least that was the idea." She gazed at it with dismay.

Caleb said, "Well, at least it's only the cover. You can make a new one, but the photograph's had it. But my paint! Have you any idea how much a drum like that costs?"

It was a rhetorical question but Jason never ignored rhetoric. He had a practical mind except, it seemed, in the matter of latching doors. He said gloomily, "Not far off a hundred dollars." It was a pity he hadn't left it at that but he added censoriously, "It didn't ought to be used from a drum that size. *My* dad always pours it into little cans so if you drop it you don't spill the lot. *And* that lid's marked the seat too. Dad always makes sure he puts the lid down on paper."

Caleb looked more affronted than ever. "I was just going to get a small can for the wicket fence but I heard Ben swearing and dropped the lid."

Jason said, "But I don't see any paper." Greta thought she'd better hustle Jason off before he could find some other fault to charge Caleb with, but Jason looked back over his shoulder and said handsomely, "I'm very sorry I didn't shut the door properly, Caleb. If you like I'll clean the dropboards tomorrow after school. I don't think there'd be time today seeing we're staying in to make up the time."

"You sure will," said Greta, an ungentle hand on his shoulder, "Surprise or no surprise. In you go." She saw Ursie coming. Not more interruptions, surely.

But Ursie wanted Caleb. "There was a message from Gideon Darroch. He says they've got the Glenorchy Road up for a few chain, so he won't bring what you want till tomorrow when it's cleared."

Caleb grinned. "Perhaps it's just as well. I'm soft enough to let them off their stay-in time once I get over this."

Greta was on the verge of saying it was for her to say what hours they must put in, but with that ruined paint sitting there dared not, so followed the children.

They were much subdued and worked with a will, anxious to be back in everyone's good graces again. They paused

only one moment when they heard indignant squawking from the direction of the orchard and the slam of a door. Arabella looked up with a gratified beam. "He's got Betsy. Better him than Ben." Then with a mischievous gleam, "I hope he let her have a good gobble of the wheat first."

They were allowed out for a break at the end of the afternoon lessons, then back in again. They were putting books away when Caleb knocked and came in. Caleb had a folder in his hand. Greta said, "Don't rush off. It looks as if Mr Armstrong has something to say."

They looked at him with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension, alerted by the formality of her tone. Caleb grinned, and said, "Not to worry. I had more paint. Ben made such a good job of sanding down the old pickets the other day, and he's now happily painting them. But not pink. We're never out of white. They won't have to be pink." Everyone relaxed. He opened the folder. "I had a good look at the cover and saw it was one of our old favourites so some of the wear-and-tear was caused by us, no doubt. I remembered I had a brochure I brought back from England that had a jolly good painting in, and thought I might be able to help Rowena restore the book. Must've been his official portrait because it's just the same. I bet he never dreamed when he was doing the job he was trained for, that children Down Under, in a land that was only discovered when Nelson was about eleven or so, would be discussing him in a schoolroom in the Antipodes. But in England I came across something connected with Nelson in a very real way, that was never in that particular book of ours, and I thought I'd like to share it with you if your teacher will allow me the time." He looked towards Greta who nodded.

"Today's as good a time as any."

Caleb continued, "I read this particular article in a newspaper there and was so interested, in fact fascinated, that I went down to Buckler's Hard in Hampshire, to see it for myself." He stopped, and said, "What is it?" There had been an unmistakable stir amongst them.

Greta waved a hand, dismissing that. "It doesn't matter. I know why but I'd like you to continue."

He went on, "I was completely enchanted with it. Buckler's Hard is on Beaulieu Creek, and is just a wide short street with a row of brick cottages each side and a church, but from about the last part of the eighteenth century to the first part of the nineteenth century, warships were built there, ships which included the Agamemnon, the first ship of the line to be commanded by Nelson. Three of the ships fought at Trafalgar. Part of the fascination Buckler's Hard had for me was to find that a country about the size of New Zealand, but with a vast population, could preserve this spot in true simplicity. It remains for me one of my best memories of England."

Kirsty put up a hand. "Did you see some of the pieces connected with Nelson that are preserved there? Museum pieces?"

Caleb nodded. "But how – do you mean to say Buckler's Hard had already been covered in your lessons? That pleases me. One night you must come over and see the slides I took round there. Better than video coverage because we can keep them on the screen for discussion. We'll do it soon while it's fresh in your minds. What is it, Jason? You're obviously bursting to ask something."

The boy had a puzzled look. "Did you meet our governess over there, then?"

Caleb's turn to look puzzled. "No, Mr & Mrs Gunn engaged her in my absence. They'd known her in Austria. I'd never even heard of her till I got home. She'd been here three or four weeks then." His mouth twitched at the recollection. "What made you think I had?"

Rowena got in. "Because of the article. Because *she* wrote it. Didn't you know? Even when you met her?"

Amazed, Caleb turned to look at Greta. "Is that true? But—"

She said, tapping his folder, "Have you got the article in here with the brochure?"

He nodded. "Sure have." He opened it, took it out, saw the title: THE PLACE WHERE TIME STANDS STILL, and the byline beneath: 'By Gretchen Elliot.' He said, "Oh, I see, a pen-name."

She shook her head. "No, my first and second names. I'm really Gretchen. That Austrian connection on my mother's side. But you must've seen it on the payroll forms."

"Buck attended to all those when I was away and I never checked. Had no reason to."

"I always got Greta at school and work, though Mother and Dad often call me Gretchen and my brother always does for some reason."

"Why not use your full name for articles like this? Why leave off the Mountford?"

"Because Dad was so well-known in his peace-making roles. His name so often appeared in the papers. For one thing, I didn't want to be known just as Hugh Mountford's daughter. It constricted my own feelings and opinions about things. Not that I wrote articles about his activities. It was too sensitive a theme. For another I wanted to be a person in my own right. I used quite a number of pen-names. Most journalists do. Especially if they write on differing topics. One guy I knew wrote on educational issues, but also did a very popular column on historic homes. Also I often typed up reports for Dad to send, as not all the places we were sent to had computer. They had to be done in a quite different style. Oddly though, we could often recognise each others' *nom de plumes*. There is nearly always a link. I remember Doug Fielding became Gould Bowler." There were giggles one after the other as each one caught on. "And Harold Sackson became Norman Williams. But using a variety of pen-names gave me the anonymity I needed. I didn't want to be caught up in the affairs of countries that needed a greater understanding than I had. But I loved being free to describe their beauty spots or the people I loved."

Caleb turned to the children. "I hope you realise how lucky you are to have Gretchen Elliot Mountford here in what some people call the back of beyond. Even if your books, the radio and the TV and newspapers still bring the world to your door."

Greta added her quota: "And some of the luck is living in one of the most beautiful spots on God's earth."

Their glances locked. He said quietly, "Thank you,

Gretchen Elliot Mountford." She thought all the pride of his ancestors who had wrested a living from the then harsh conditions and grimly inhospitable isolation was in his bearing and his tone.

None of the older children uttered, but into the silence was a softly breathed but fervent, "Yes!" from little Arabella.

That night after dinner, Ursie was having a long conversation with a Queenstown friend in her own quarters so Greta and Caleb were on their own in front of the fire, reading. He looked up from the page, and said to her, "Did you hear Jason's remark as they left this afternoon? He said to Kirsty: 'Started off as a stinker of a day, didn't it? But it ended up pretty good after all.' I liked that, Greta. I was pretty rough on them earlier."

She gave him a warm smile. "Don't whip yourself over that, Caleb. We all do when we get mad with children, and they've in most cases forgotten all about it. They were fair little devils this morning long before you crashed in, but oddly enough the mishap over the poultry and chasing after them seemed to relieve their feelings. And they so enjoyed your not knowing the article was mine. It sure was a coincidence."

"More than a coincidence, I think," he said seriously, "it's almost as if we were meant to meet."

She looked surprised. "Oh, hardly, think of the thousands who must have read that article. No links created with them. Those things are always happening." Then she relented. "But I am glad to think my article took you to Buckler's Hard. Especially when, in your schooldays, you seem to have had a soft spot for the Admiral. Also, that's something one misses away from one's homeland . . . being able to comment on places known and loved to other people. Not exactly homesickness because I've lived in too many places for that, but a sort of nostalgia. That's why I liked it when Garth told me that you'd called London a Queen of cities. Till then I thought you had probably hated the congestion, the hold-ups on country roads on public holidays, the crowded beaches. That nostalgia is why I go over to Ludwigtown to

see the Gunns. They were visiting Tante Evelina, with their two children, when my mother and I were there visiting relations. We can recall things together."

He grinned. "I must come with you next time. Just so the Gunns can see how well we've settled down after that wild and woolly start, all enmity forgotten."

"Oh, you don't have to bother. Theresa *was* worried, even if she giggled at the time. She rang me the following week. I assured her that all was well, that discord can't flourish in Ursie's presence."

Again the grin. "Prosaic sort of reason. You know it's hardly been all due to Ursie. There's been accord between us when Ursie hasn't been within coo-ee . . . or another living soul for instance, like when we were moon-watching!"

She didn't attempt to grin back. He was far too inclined to take advantage of these softer moments. She closed her book, and said, "Well, I've looked up something that will do for a side-light on tomorrow's lessons. But I've a lot of prep to do for at least three projects. With so many different stages and ages, it's time-taking if you aren't well prepared." She sounded very much the school-ma'am, "And when Ursie comes back I'll leave you to it. She'll want to watch that programme at eight."

The door opened and Ursie looked in, her hand on the door-knob. "Myrna asked me if her mother could come over tonight to watch TV with me. Their Kirsty wants to watch something else. So I looked in to say if Greta wanted to stay here where the room is already warm, it's okay by me. She can have the big table to spread her stuff out on and make you your last cuppa. Goodnight."

They heard her footsteps retreating, then returning. Again she didn't come right in. "Caleb, can I see you for a moment? Something I forgot to remind you of."

When he came back Greta had picked a couple of books on New Zealand's Fiordland out of the well-filled bookcases each side of the fireplace, picked up her notebook and was preparing to depart. She forestalled him. "My fire's all set, just needs a match. Ursie means well but I'm off. You're quite capable of making that last cuppa yourself."

"I was looking forward to the company," he said, deadpan.

"I'm not going to be much company. This is going to take a hefty slice of writing if I'm going to be one step ahead of the kids."

"A hefty slice!" he repeated. "What boring language for a newspaper woman who could write an article like the one about Buckler's Hard. It was positively lyrical."

"Well, you can't expect me to wax lyrical all the time. Don't forget you don't like newspaper women. We *are* very boring at times when we aren't hot on the trail after news. Now—"

He crossed to her, took the armful of books from her, put them on the table. His hand came out to grip her wrist, bringing him so close she had to look up at him. He said: "Does it still rankle? It mustn't. You said you hated generalisations and I *was* guilty of that, plus I was involved in a very unfortunate incident over there when I saw how a rapacious thirst for sensational news could destroy compassion. I'm not getting at the English Press in particular, girl, *we* have some like that too. But I must be fair and admit that over here, and there, journalists supply us with insight and understanding, and even, at times, help to right wrongs. How's that for a full apology?"

She fixed her gaze on the bronzed lean column of his throat. "That's an excellent apology. So let it rest there. Perhaps it's all the more sincere now you know the sort of stuff I write. And I appreciate the fact that you liked it before you met me. It's a pity if people like you because of what you've written. So don't get all carried away, Caleb Armstrong!"

He guffawed, so she looked up for an explanation. "You absolute idiot! I didn't know you wrote like that the other night, did I? What we shared while that moon rose had nothing of that in it. Now did it? Answer me!"

But she couldn't, wouldn't answer. His grip lessened; his expression changed. "All right, let it go. You did ask me to soft-pedal. I keep forgetting how recent your loss is. I'll have to remember you had a life of your own before you came to

Armstrong's Valley. That it's only five months since you were – since plans for your wedding to Martin dominated your thoughts. Even if you knew disillusionment. I ought to have had more patience, more understanding. You see *I* was engaged once but it's so long ago it's ceased to matter. But I don't want to talk about that now. Some day, yes. What an escape that was. Look, your room's going to take some time to warm up. I've got a report to write myself. I've been dodging it. Thought by now I'd finished with all that. My study's cold too. How about my bringing my papers in here? You can work at one end. I'll work at the other. I promise not to talk."

She burst out laughing. "Well, that'll be a new experience. You're not exactly the strong, silent hero of fiction, you know."

"Touché. In fact, not a hero at all. But I'll prove to you I can work in silence, even with – no, let that go. I must get this report mapped out, at least. It's to go to the Department of Agriculture."

She put her books down. "I'll fetch what I need to use from the schoolroom and if you show me you can apply yourself I might even offer to put it through the processor tomorrow night, if it's not necessary to get it away tomorrow. And if you've to break the silence ban, by, say, asking me for the synonym book or something I won't glare at you."

When she got back he was hard at it, the fire had been made up to last all night because the heating had been off all day, and it was heavenly to be free of TV for once, with no sound save the dropping of ash through the bars and the rhythmic ticking of the clock that had come out from Austria in the long-ago. Through the uncurtained window the moon, not quite as bright as the other night, picked out the darker line of the ranges deep in, with here and there a glint of snow.

Oh, the blessed anodyne of work. Routine that lulled you into less painful byways. Here she was, thirteen thousand miles away from home and that newspaper world that had been hers for so long. She certainly must not let the stability of this place con her into thinking it was truly Arcadia. She was in danger of succumbing to its pastoral simplicity.

Ah, there was the rub. Feelings could run as high here as anywhere. Caleb, no doubt, had known anguish when a young man if what Erica Godsby had told her was true. Now *she* had come into his life, seemingly enchanted with the setting of of his kingdom. A complete contrast to the way Erica had found it. Perhaps then a valid reason. Big Slip hadn't been bulldozed away then. Neither had Hunters' Lodge existed, bringing the world nearer the valley. But her main doubt was whether once again, she might be falling for a way of life, not the man. Botheration . . . she must push it to the back of her mind. Enjoy what could be enjoyed without any need for heart-searching, for decisions.

Hunters' Lodge had its uses. It provided a touch of glamour. They were all looking forward to this Ball. Fortunately it was to take place before the big effort of the October muster and shearing of the wethers. It could make a great article for – no, she mustn't. While Caleb, she knew, was grateful for the access, he wouldn't want more publicity. Nice to contemplate the Ball, though. Jane and Myrna were excited about it. They both had mothers in Queenstown who were going to baby-sit their grandchildren then. Garth was disgruntled that Caleb had got in first with Greta. Said so openly in an engaging sort of way that Caleb had taken well. He had chuckled and said, "Garth, at your age, you can have the pick of the Queenstown girls. I'm a bit long in the tooth for some of them, Greta's a godsend."

Garth had grinned, "More than a godsend. Most of us will envy you, lucky devil! I don't recall you ever taking Olga Edwards to the Ball."

Greta had tried to look indignant. "I just love being talked over as if I wasn't here! All this competition could go to my head. It's a long time since anyone as young as you asked me to be his partner. I used to get paired off with men in my father's circle who talked about themselves flat out during the dances and then told my papa I was a good conversationalist."

"So you are," Garth had said affectionately, throwing an arm about her shoulders, "and a damned good sport to boot. Not all the time getting offended because we talk nothing but

sheep and deer. I forget what circles you've moved in . . . and to be so good with spanners too, is unbelievable."

Caleb had said as they moved off, "Indeed you are a good sport, Greta, and we *are* lucky. Teaching, gardening, baby-sitting so the wives can go out with their men, and glamorous to boot."

She'd burst out laughing, "Oh, Caleb, it's not glamour with Garth. It's a case of "love me, love my car engine."

All this was passing through her mind when her prep was finished. She didn't speak. Caleb seemed to be getting on effortlessly now, after an hour or so when he'd had frequent recourse to notebooks and some journals that she realized had come back from overseas with him. His pen was flowing. Maybe he was as fluent with his pen as his speech. He looked up suddenly and caught her eye. "Oh, you're finished. I'll pack this in now if you like. I've got most of it done."

She shook her head. "Pity not to finish it when the muse is flowing. By tomorrow you might be chasing bantams out of the cabbages or painting pickets pink. Not the sort of activity you want sandwiched in to producing a report. I'll just look over these essays on New Zealand birds. I'm learning a lot from the children. A sort of ornithological world new to me."

"Oh, great. If you're sure?"

She was, and settled on the couch where she could place the pages to one side as she read. She got absorbed, didn't stir till she heard his chair pushed back. He came to stand in front of her. She looked up, her brown eyes asparkle. "Bart is a gem. His mother says none of the others ever read the dictionary like a book. Here's one of the results. He's got a very good page on the bellbird, the *korimako*. And here's a bonus. That's what's so rewarding about children. They dig out things never in any curriculum. Listen: 'It is very interesting that there is a South American bellbird called the *arapunga* which is quite like one of our Maori words. Like our *ponga* for tree-fern which is pronounced punga. The dictionary says in brackets for the South American one: *Tupi araponga*, anyway.' He brought this into a lesson the other day and Jason said scornfully, 'You're just showing

off.' I expected a hot retort but Bart said very reasonably, 'No I'm not. It's just that dictionaries are *my* thing like trees and mosses are yours.' It started Rowena off on the journey here of the first canoes from Hawaiiki and how natural it is for their language to be linked with that part of the world. It's what education is all about."

He said, "You've got what it takes for here. Very versatile. When I got over my amazement at the Gunns thinking you'd fit in here without yearning for the fleshpots and being snooty about our way of life, I kept getting surprised in other ways too, not only in your knowledge, due, I suppose, to mixing in your father's world but also at the sheer simplicity of you. But about this report, I've got the facts right but I could be out of my depth in the way I've presented it. Would you look it over? I'm not looking for praise, just for a bit of know-how. This will be discussed and pulled to pieces by the committee in the Capital, chunks of it could appear in the papers, which scares hell out of me, and could even be brought up in Parliament by the Minister of Agriculture. But most of all, because I'm vitally interested in this aspect of our rural needs and our dependence upon world markets and subsidies, or appearing to be able to see the points of view of farmers of other countries with *their* varying needs, I'd like it to be fair and accurate and present it in the best possible way. Would you?"

She nodded. "I will. I'd like to, and I promise not to be biased in your favour."

He smiled, eyes warming, "I've no objection to you being biased in my favour in other areas, Gretchen. All right, all right, I can see by the spark in your eye that that's a taboo subject, too personal. But I would appreciate your opinion. It would give me more confidence in despatching it."

She looked at him suspiciously. "You aren't the only one to be surprised tonight. At our first meeting I'd never have suspected you of lacking in confidence. It wouldn't have seemed to add up to Caleb of Caleb's Kingdom."

He said soberly, and slowly, "You said earlier that you didn't want your work to be associated with your father's name. I'd much rather think of this property of mine as

Armstrong's Valley. I told you that. The other has too despotic a sound. Remember it belonged to old Isidore Kingdom."

She matched his look with one as serious. "I can understand that."

He said, "I won't sit beside you, breathing down your neck, wanting to explain things. I'll make our cuppa."

When he came back he was surprised to see her wide-eyed with appreciation. "Why Caleb, you've got the true journalistic touch. Something I'd not expected. Some of these terms I'd not met up with before, they're too specialised, but despite that the sheer logic and sense of it all comes through, and the understanding too. Nothing here to jar the sensibilities of another hemisphere, with different needs and cultures, yet still putting New Zealand's case very well while looking at it from a world standpoint.

"I've jotted down a few pointers, like this, for instance:" she tapped the third paragraph. "In my opinion this ought to be used as the intro. It catches the interest immediately. The other is just a mild lead-in. Once the interest is caught, you can plunge in with what you're putting across. And I think you should stress a little more that you were over there, that this isn't theory but personal observation. Tell me, did you ever take a course in journalism?"

He shook his head. "No, but I was one of the sub-editors of a student magazine in my time at Lincoln Agricultural College near Christchurch."

"It shows." Her tone was sincere.

He took it from her. "I feel as if I've just won an outstanding award, coming from you. I'll run that through when the outside work's done tomorrow, after I switch it. You put plenty of your free time into things you aren't responsible for as it is."

Her eyes held his. "I'd like to do it, after you've made your revisions. Will you let me?"

"Yes, sure will. Now here's our snack and we'll turn on the late news. I need the late weather report." That finished, he rose from his chair, she from the couch. He started, "Now let us seek our—" He stopped dead, looked as if he didn't

quite know where to go from there. She wasn't used to seeing him at a loss. She smiled to herself. The despotic image was fading fast.

She finished it for him. "Let us seek our well-earned rest."

His grin flashed out. "I wasn't putting it as impersonally as that, but let it go. You said to cool it."

He opened the door into the long passage, switched on the lights for her. His lips twitched. "You are the most disarming creature. I won't always go along with it as I did tonight. Docilely. I'm damned glad to get that report out of the way, but I'd planned a very different evening. With this Ball coming up, I thought we ought to try a few steps together. It seems as if Chester is one up on me if you already know he's such a good dancer. And he is. He's also a good M.C. and because so many of his guests are in the older bracket – it's only the well-established ones who can afford his sort of accommodation – he throws in some of the traditional stuff. For instance do you waltz?"

She threw him a disparaging look. "Dear man, use your brain! I told you Dad was six months in Vienna! All the older men and wives waltzed."

He threw up his hands in surrender. "Okay, shrew, you win."

She thought of what Ursie had said. "That reminder Ursie gave you, was it to switch the diesel fuel range to night-heat perhaps?"

His dead-pan expression again. "No. Not a reminder, a suggestion. Want to know what it was? She said: 'Don't forget the passage isn't the only way home to the schoolroom. It has a front porch wreathed with wisteria and it's very pleasant taking a girl through the garden. It sometimes happens that the longest way round is the sweetest way home.'" He cocked an eye at her expectantly.

She said promptly, "I'd never have suspected Ursie of such depravity. It's goodnight, Caleb."

He chuckled as she fled and his goodnight followed her along the corridor and he added, "Gretchen II."

A determined man. A man hard to resist. But it was much too soon. She didn't trust herself.

Chapter Seven

Greta found it hard to settle to sleep. She was too contrarily aware of how, despite her request for him to slow the pace, she had longed for them to have taken that longer, sweeter way round, to have captured the magic experienced when they had watched the moonrise. It would have been heaven tonight to have drifted round the living-room in his arms to the strains of a waltz. That living-room floor had no wall-to-wall carpet. Instead it had two huge Indian rugs in beautifully soft blended colours. She'd commented on it to Ursie once when she'd found her polishing the wood surrounds. "Wall-to-wall would save a lot of work."

Ursie had looked up. "Oh, this is the room we always use for dancing. Many's the time I've circled it with my Hamish. All the young staff come over at some time to practise some of the older steps when there's a formal ball in the offing. And those who've never danced before and thought they hated it, have learned to love it here."

Greta switched her mind off the tantalizing idea of dancing with Caleb . . . she hoped he knew how to do a slow foxtrot too. That could be a dreamy delight. And of course there'd have to be, when they were all assembled, the romping fun of more modern steps. Well, no doubt there'd be practices before the Hunting Lodge Ball. Now, go to sleep. Instantly her mind immediately reverted waywardly to the homestead garden under that lessening moon . . . that brilliance of stars, the perfectly symmetrical shapes of the twin lombardies that guarded what they called the front gate to distinguish it from the drive-in . . . the whisper of the aspens, somehow seductively intimate, the perfume of the rosemary, the pungent odours of the tiny herbs that grew between the

home-baked bricks of that winding path, and, at the end, the wisteria-wreathed porch with its *totara* shingles. Caleb said his father had gone to no end of trouble to have those made in the North Island to replace the ones that had, finally, split with the weather. What a continuity this place had known, despite the harshness of the environment at times, the winter snows, sometimes of blizzard ferocity, when sheep would be buried in the drifts and the men were out for gruelling hours digging them out, expeiencing huge losses, with the only road to civilisation then, that rough mule-track to Drumlogie, impassable for weeks on end. But they had persevered, and their memory lingered on.

Strange wasn't it, that there had never been a broken marriage here through all those changing years? Not that Greta was in the least hidebound about that. Sometimes there was no other solution than to break a flawed tie. There was a story behind every break-up, her mother had once said, to which only God knows all.

But they had lasted here. She wondered what the secret was. They must have had what it takes, those women, but had their men been the calibre of Caleb II, making it worth-while for the women who had worked side by side with them, had reached the heights with them, borne their children, loved life and laughter, books and music, had known the mixed joys of rearing and educating children? Children who had grown up as Caleb had, quite capable of taking his place in a wider world beyond these shores. Yet his first love, fearing the hardships, had fled; fled in a cowardly fashion too. She resented that for the vulnerable Caleb he must've been.

Oh, stop it, Greta, she told herself or you'll never get to sleep! Well, you've analysed it fairly well. Yes, you admit it is the permanency of this corner of the earth that attracts you. So recognizing that would surely keep her from making another mistake? It haunted her still. It hadn't been fair to Martin. Seeing him as the one who could give her what she craved for, a settled home. If she had loved him as – she shied away from that thought, was driven back to it – if she had loved him as she *thought* she loved Caleb, the man she had first met in reciprocal anger, he might never

have turned to Virginia. He must have known it was never a grand passion with her. But for that he might have been still alive. Suddenly she thought of Caleb's views on that and felt instantly comforted. If Martin had found her less than satisfying, he could have asked to be released. But . . . well, Martin had always had an eye to the main chance and had regarded her father as influential. She shook her mind free of it.

Yet, in spite of what she now knew . . . her feelings for Caleb, she had told him to slow the pace. Why? Because he was too dear, too fine, to have a girl marry him because he represented a security she had never known. Even if at the moment she thought she was in love with him, she must be sure. What she felt for Caleb, a strong physical attraction as well as a deep longing to share his sort of life, might even be another example of being caught on the rebound.

But oh, the compatibility of tonight, that sense of sharing. The kindred silence while they both worked. What had Shakespeare said? "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments." Oh dear, Shakespeare didn't have a situation like this in mind when he wrote that sonnet. Yet, a few lines down, if she remembered it aright, didn't he say of love, "It is the star to every wandering bark."? A memory shot into her mind of her mother once saying of a friend of Greta's who'd developed a sudden craze for Shakespeare, "I think she must be in love. I've noticed before that when one falls in love, one's thoughts often turn to the immortal bard." At that thought Greta suddenly chuckled. Relaxed, she drifted off to sleep, her last thought, *and I did like him calling me Gretchen II.*

Tomorrow, of course, as always, was another day. Quite a prosaic day. She was glad of that, you couldn't continue to analyse your thoughts, feelings, when you were in charge of a classroom. The only unusual thing was that at breakfast Caleb asked her to give the children just half an hour for lunch.

"It's this surprise, you see. It will arrive mid-afternoon I think and it would spoil it for them not to join in right away, even if, primarily, it's a gift for you."

She was mystified. "But no-one's going for the mail today."

He chuckled maddeningly. "It would be hard to post this. I can't think where you'd put the stamp! There are other means of delivery. Wait and see." This was a lighter side to Caleb she hadn't seen before.

At a quarter past two, as instructed, she said to the children, "You're all to go to the kitchen here for your snacks. But go to the toilets first and be sure to wash your hands." No waiting.

Ursie had savouries for them and what had always been called Jumble biscuits here: double rounds stuck together with pink butter cream, and the top one had a hole in it cut out with the first Gretchen's old brass thimble and hundreds-and-thousands scattered on it. Caleb brought glasses of orangeade out of the fridge as they finished, put out straws and said, "Now when you are finished you can join Greta and me near the big barn."

He held out his hand to her as they neared it. "Up on to the outside staircase to the loading-platform. By the phone call I got half an hour ago, it ought to be nearing the last bend in the road. With a bit of luck we'll see it before the kids arrive."

He almost pulled her up with him in his hurry. "This is because I haven't the faintest idea when your birthday is. It could be near or gone. Theresa couldn't tell me. But whenever, this is your present, only you'll have to share it." He put up a band to shade his eyes. "Ah . . . here he is, good man."

She saw, rounding the last bend a horse-float, coming slowly as it needed to, on that descent. She gasped, "Caleb, you haven't bought me a horse? I know you call Dickon a slow old nag, but he suits me very well."

Again he chuckled, "No, you'll like this much better." Surely he was't giving her a fawn to rear? But it wouldn't come from that direction. She couldn't say more because the children descended upon them in a pack. Ursie was in the rear and from the houses streamed the mothers, Jane with Todd in her arms.

The truck driver negotiated the cattle-stops with care, then came to a perfect stop in front of them. "Now I know what he's been up to," Ursie was heard to say. "That's Gideon

Darroch from Mount Olivet." She added, for Greta's benefit, "beyond Glenorchy at the Head-of-the-Lake."

Gideon, a broad, rugged type, like Caleb, got out and was introduced to Greta, the only one not known to him.

"Did he travel okay?" asked Caleb. Gideon looked at the children. "Don't rush or squeal too loudly, they've –" and he winked at Caleb as he used the plural – "just come about forty-eight kilometres, and it's their first journey on wheels. Is it that paddock there, Caleb? Then I'll go in and make a wide turn, better than reversing later. Shut the gate when we're all in."

It was accomplished skilfully. The children rushed towards the back doors, Caleb waved them back a little, and as they let down the ramp they got a glimpse of a partitioned interior and the rumps of two donkeys, one big, one small. Gideon said indulgently, "I know you ordered just one, man, but my tender-hearted Annabel couldn't bear to part mother and son. I'm afraid they're already named in the Glenorchy tradition of Biblical names, Keziah and Esau."

From his mother's arms Todd cried joyfully, "See-saw, sea-saw!"

Gideon looked amazed. "Good grief, kids grow up while you aren't looking. He was only gooing and cooing when I saw him last. Now, easy does it. I'll take Keziah out first. They'll need a scamper. By the way, even Esau is broken to the saddle. Young Luke the Less saw to that."

"Luke the Less? Why?" This was Greta.

Gideon laughed. "Named for Annabel's grandfather. We don't call Luke that these days to his face but often use it to tell them apart. Out you come, Keziah, take it easy, atta girl." Esau came without fuss too, kicked up his heels, shook his head and went racing round the paddock. He, like his mother, had a fawny-beige coat with darker mane and tail, and great big liquid eyes, but his coat was more luxurious.

"Oh, how apt," said Greta, her eyes shining, "Esau, the hairy one. Oh, thank you, Caleb, remembering I'm much more at home on a donkey." She made a spontaneous movement towards him, and checked it immediately. She thought, Heavens, imagine if I'd kissed him in front of them all.

Gideon turned down the offer of afternoon tea. "No, I had it at the Wilderness with Nathaniel and Letitia and seeing I'm staying the night there I'll just get this pair used to all the kids."

When the donkeys got used to their surroundings, the two men let the children on them, with just a sack thrown over their backs, but holding them on, "We won't put the saddles on them yet, they've had a long, strange day. You can have proper rides tomorrow. I'll take this through the gate first and Greta and Caleb can get the saddles off the front seat and hang them in the stable."

Ursie said, "I'm going to insist on your having a snack, Gideon. Leave these two to look after things. Come on."

Myrna appeared. "Now all you youngsters can come across to my place and we'll have a game of netball. I think Greta should be able to have Keziah to herself without an audience." Disappointed objections rent the air but Myrna was adamant. "I know you all. You'd be hoping she'd fall off. March."

Greta was still fondling Esau. What a velvety muzzle. "I've never had such an imaginative gift before." She sighed with pure happiness.

Caleb said, "Let's take the saddles into the stable now, but first . . . I saw you check that instinctive gesture of thanks. Everyone's out of sight now . . . how about it? What's wrong with now?"

She gave a swift look round. Even if anyone was watching, Keziah, standing docilely beside them, was screening them except for . . . "Well, bend down then," she said, "you're so tall, even if I am too, for a woman." He bent his head. She lifted her cheek towards him only to have his fingers grip her chin, so that her mouth slid across his cheek and reached his lips.

He took his time, then released her just a little, his eyes smiling down into hers. "Much nicer than in front of a crowd. Right, let's take the truck and float through for him. Perhaps you'd open the gate?"

As they came to the truck she said, "Oh, I see he's left the keys in the ignition. Now me, I take them out if there are kids

around, just in case. Caleb, what is it?" He'd swung round and was gazing at her intently, but with a puzzled look.

He said slowly, "I don't know what it is, myself. It's just as if I caught at a memory. It happened once before when you thought I was getting at you at the Rectory for leaving the keys in. Which, as you rightly said was perfectly safe. But it's stupid, it's almost as if – as if I recognized your voice."

He was so serious about it, she stared. "But that's idiotic, you couldn't have, then."

"I know. But it sort of niggled at me now as it did then."

She giggled. "It's just like that story I read the other night. This guy heard some others talking and fancied he'd heard the voice before. Quite creepy the way it was handled. Then he thought he'd heard it in a nightmare whereas in reality he'd heard it in his sleep when the villains were plotting. However, I don't suppose I'd like to be remembered or connected with a nightmare."

"That's highly unlikely. Your voice isn't in the slightest nightmarish. Your voice is more evocative of summer. Goodness, I sound like a poet. What's come over me? Yes, come to think of it, I seem to remember this voice was cross. Then it *must've* been a nightmare. Or else I *have* got that extra sensory perception I kidded the youngsters about, and I'm recalling the first words you ever spoke to me *were* vitriolic."

She said, smiling, "Come on, you're talking nonsense."

"Well, there again I read once that the people we love the most are the ones we feel so easy with that we know no embarrassment if we talk nonsense."

"I think you just made that up on the spur of the moment. Change the subject."

"All right. Look, I'm sure you were dying to have a go on Keziah yourself. I'll get her saddle and you can try her out."

"I'd love to, but don't bother about the saddle. I've ridden donkeys bareback before. It's not like on a horse, not so far to fall."

His eyes twinkled, "And as you know, I've no objection to putting you up. Thought I'd done myself out of the pleasure of that by giving you this. Now put your foot in my hand and

for goodness sake grip well with your knees or we'll have an anti-climax, and I've found this a very satisfying day."

There was no doubt about her love of donkeys; they certainly added to the children's enjoyment of life. Nor, to Greta's great relief, did any of them pass comment upon Caleb giving her so expensive a gift. Not that the children would, she amended in her thoughts, but the women or the single men might have.

The Ball drew near. The men joined enthusiastically in the practices. Jane remarked slyly about that, however. "Buck said he's never known Caleb so keen. Before this he often used to groan about what a waste of time when most of them were darned good dancers in any case." Greta disregarded this.

Caleb asked her if she wanted a day off in Queenstown shopping for it. Ursie answered for her. "I suppose you mean for glad rags? You don't need to. She's got a ravishing frock, perfect for her colouring. Like a wattle grove, or, as she'd probably call it, mimosa. She didn't make the mistake of thinking because we lived in the back of beyond there'd be no fun. So she came with three dance frocks, and, being Greta, she is lending the other two to Jane and Myrna to save them wearing what they've worn so often before. They're thrilled. She took Myrna's up for her."

"They can wear any colour," said Greta. "Not like me. Blue doesn't suit me a scrap, and blue is such a lovely colour."

Caleb sounded surprised, "I've seen you wearing a blue tartan skirt, I'm sure."

"Well, that's the Elliot tartan. But a mere man would never notice I always put a green or scarlet sweater between that and my face. Or a white blouse."

"I think you must be mad," said Caleb, "You'd look nice in anything. And I think you're mad too, Ursie, not coming. With Jane and Myrna's mothers coming out to stay for a few days, and old Ben here, I can't understand you. Chester Burroughs will be as disappointed as Esau deprived of a carrot." Greta caught Ursie's eye but disengaged her glance quickly. Caleb hadn't missed it. "There's something up. Tell

me. He dances so well and so do you. I'm surprised you're passing up the chance."

Ursie said shortly, "There'll be plenty to take my place with him. Quite a few wives with the hunting buffs at present, and a crowd coming from Queenstown."

His tone was shrewd. "I've an idea none of them will make up to him for your company. Do come."

She hesitated, looked across at Greta, and said, "I suppose I'd better tell him. He's a persistent hound."

Greta nodded. "I think you should. He probably knows Chester well enough to realize how hard it is to make him take no for an answer. And I do feel this is one way of making him accept that you mean no. But I hate you to miss the dancing when you love it so much. Maybe Caleb will take us to one of the dances at Ludwigtown or Drumlogie to make up for it when Chester won't be there."

"Yes, sure" said Caleb, "but what occasioned this?"

The colour came up into Ursie's cheeks. She looked across at Greta most appealingly. Greta looked a question. Ursie nodded. So Greta explained. She made it light. "Not surprisingly, Chester Burroughs has fallen for Ursie and she has no feeling for him what ever. So isn't encouraging him."

Caleb said promptly, "I admire his taste. Ursie, are you sure? I know I criticized him a bit to start with for being high-handed. First so cocksure he could buy the Wilderness, then this place. But I hand this to him: he doesn't hold a grudge and he's been generous in his dealings. And of course I'm forever grateful to him for clearing Big Slip. Don't feel prejudiced against him because of my original feelings. And Ursie, it's a long time since Hamish died."

Ursie said gently but convincingly, not embarrassed now seeing Caleb hadn't looked amazed, "No, if I had felt years ago, for any man, one quarter of what I felt for Hamish I mightn't have hesitated. There was someone once. But I never have, and apart from that there are times when Chester gets on my nerves. It's as simple as that."

Caleb got up and went round the table to her, gave her an enormous hug, and said, "Then so be it."

When Ursie went away presently, Caleb said to Greta, "I'm

glad Ursie was able to confide in you. I think she's even closer to you than to Olga, who was here for years. It's a great compliment."

Later that night Caleb did take Greta the longest and sweetest way round, whisking her out of the side door before she had time to protest. He said, "Now, don't scuffle or Ursie will wonder what's going on. She has very keen hearing."

He stopped first under an arch. There was a faint perfume from it on the night air. Because he had paused, she put a hand up to it and said, "What is this creeper? I can't put a name to it."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes, I like to know all the names."

"Well, if you must know, it's called the New Pandorea Wonga wonga vine. I just planted it last year and it's a fairly vigorous climber but never gets out of hand. Now is that enough of a botanical lesson for you, schoolma'am?"

She was swept with delicious laughter. She did enjoy this quick give-and-take. She said demurely, "Well, I love its sprays of little pendulous flowers, each with a sort of deep red tongue inside. No, not a tongue, a patch. I thought Mother would like it."

"It's called Ruby Heart because of that. I'm sure your mother could find out about it at Kew Gardens. But I give you fair warning, I didn't get you out here to talk about your mother and I doubt if all our conversation will be suitable to put in a letter. However, there is something I want to ask you about. Come into your porch. And don't ask me about the wisteria, everyone knows about wisteria."

She was still laughing as they sat down and raised no objection when he slipped an arm between her and the bars of the back of the seat. "This is to do with what you said about Chester Burroughs . . . that he was hard to say no to. I felt you spoke from personal experience. Tell me, was he looking your way first, then turned to Ursie?"

For a moment she was speechless with surprise. Then she started to laugh. "No, you chump! He just pestered me to write up this place as a sort of extension to his Hunting Lodge, stressing the fact that it could offer a taste of life on a huge

sheep and deer station, with riding tracks and the chance of seeing the shearing of the wool, and perhaps even the taking of the antler velvet, if he could persuade you. He'd found out I was a freelance journalist. He had it all mapped out, how I could give it a personal plug . . . this marvellously remote valley so beautiful even a tough journalist could succumb to its magic. Garth had told him I was a world traveller because of Dad, and Chester thought that, incorporated in the article, would enhance it even further. His bouts of enthusiasm are rather exhausting. Finally I got quite cross with him, said he must be mad if he thought I'd queer my pitch with an absentee employer before he even got back in the country, and that quite apart from that, I wouldn't intrude on your privacy."

She thought for a moment. "As for him fancying me, you are right off beam. It was just my pen and my contacts he was after. I feel rather sorry for him because he really does feel drawn to Ursie, but his sort of life would never suit her."

"Well, I'm damned glad you didn't consent. I'd have been furious. I don't want any more tourists encouraged to stay in the chalets. His voice deepened. "One thing makes sense. You said Ursie wouldn't like his life-style. That can apply to other people too. Although it's been an easier season, there have been times when I've wished we could have one of our late snowstorms so you can really see it under the worst of possible conditions. Not so much enchantment about the valley then. You've seen it only at its loveliest."

There was no mistaking his meaning. She said slowly, "I don't want to go into what you're getting at, but Lance and Buck showed me videos and slides of your worst storm ever. Not so long ago. Three years, was it? Well, no-one could view that and not realize to the full the hazards and losses. Now, can we talk about something else?"

He turned to her swiftly, tightened his arm, and said, "Well, there's this. Not quite conversation, but surely a means of communication."

She put up a hand to hold him back. "Caleb, I did ask you to slow the pace!"

His tone was as indignant as hers. "Well, if you knew

the pace I'd like to make, you wouldn't call this anything but slow!"

She couldn't help laughing so of course it completely put her off her guard and the next moment there wasn't any room in her feelings for anything but delight. Then she became a prey to emotions such as she had never before experienced. This sort of magic was what the poets wrote about. She opened her eyes after a few moments and saw the stars through the gaps in the gnarled old wisteria branches.

She let a fleeting wonder pass through her mind about those same poets. The lyrics would be written afterwards, she knew, in recollection.

He said, "Isn't it wonderful in this latitude and in this atmosphere, that even though there's just a sliver of moon left, the starlight's enough for me to see your features by?" He added: "You know that on the night of the Ball, we'll be bringing the others back with us? Not the lads, of course, they'll be seeing their girls back to Queenstown, but this road home is still hazardous enough for me to insist I drive my own men and their wives home, because I'll be the one who won't be drinking. Chester makes sure safe transport is laid on for those he's not sure of, travelling the other way. That's one of his redeeming features. So tonight was to compensate me for not having you to myself then, Gretchen II. And so, goodnight . . ."

She admitted to herself, later, it *had* been compensating.

It was fun to be dressing for a ball, here in the back of beyond. Jane had been a first-rate hairdresser in Dunedin before she wed Buck. She'd given Greta a real surprise when she had sought her out a few days earlier. She'd said, rather diffidently, "Greta, Caleb's asked me something special. You may think it odd, even be disappointed, but as a matter-of-fact, I found it rather sweet. I haven't said a word to the others, not even to Buck. I didn't want it commented on . . . you know, perhaps in a teasing sort of way."

By now Greta's attention was riveted. "Go on, Jane. Don't forget he's an unusual sort of man. I won't take offence. Comes from being Caleb of the Kingdom, I suppose."

Jane looked relieved. "I only hope you aren't disappointed, though I'm hoping you won't make me disappoint *him*. Your hair is just long enough now to be piled high. with curled ends, caught at the top with a comb. That suits shoulder-length hair. So when he asked me how I was styling yours, I just had to tell him and he said he'd like your hair left just as it is, with your side-parting, and cut straight across, with both sides naturally curling round your cheeks. Like a long page-boy bob. But without the fringe."

Greta gazed at her, lost for words. Then, dazedly, "Are you sure he actually specified all that?"

Jane nodded, looking relieved. "He did, then he went one further in surprising me. You know he went over to Ludwigtown and that they've got that craft shop with the Austrian type goods?"

Greta nodded. Jane went on, "Well he got this, and said to ask you if you'd mind wearing it."

Greta said, "Well, it looks as if I've got some say in something!" They both giggled.

Jane drew from a paper bag a sort of Alice-band of finely plaited strands of brown silk in which gleamed specks of green and gold. "He said Ursie had shown him your dress and he thought it would look just right with it. It would too, you know. He also said he got the idea when you were outside and suddenly pushed your sun-glasses back over your hair."

Greta looked more amazed. "Now there's a romantic thought for you. Aren't men quaint? I believe I'll do it. It *would* suit the frock."

Jane heaved a sigh. "Thank goodness. I'll tell him you like the idea."

Came the night of the Ball. Caleb had said, "There are drawbacks to living in the same house but at least let me call for you at your quarters. I'll come through the schoolroom into your sitting-room."

She liked that idea herself. She thought Caleb with his broad shoulders and tapering leanness would look well in black and white, but he was even more handsome when he came through wearing an Armstrong kilt in the green and

blue with the thin red line through it. She was surprised into saying, "Oh, you look wonderful. I'd not realized there might be some men in the kilt."

"Oh, so many are descendants of Scots pioneers." He held out his hands to her, "Thank you for doing what I asked. The bandeau. It suits you. Simplicity does. But the rest," looking at her dress, "is sheer elegance."

The widely scooped-out neck of golden-yellow glinted with metallic gold threads and below the dropped waistline the gold and green and brown of the tiny pleats shimmered in the strong light above her and would fan out as she danced, she knew. Her only ornament was a tortoiseshell pendant carved in some Austrian design and threaded on brown velvet. It was perfect.

He raised his brow, "My guess is that it was bought in Paris."

"Wrong, sir, but not far out. Brussels."

The grey eyes gleamed. "I dare not disturb that make-up, I know, but allow me this." He drew her towards him a little and put his cheek against hers. It had that disturbingly masculine feel that no matter how recently he had shaved, Caleb's face would always know.

As they drew apart, still holding hands, she said, her eyes on a level with his shoulder, "Crest badge and all . . . the arm embowed, the arm the first Armstrong used to save his King, one of the early Scottish kings, when his horse was killed under him and the Armstrong grasped him by the thigh and dragged him across to his own mount."

He looked delighted. "Good. You've been reading up on us. So you should. That's how the name came into being. You said the first Armstrong so you know it was a Fairbairn who did it, and the King rewarded him by bestowing upon him lands on the Borders and the name of Armstrong. Lance Fairbairn will be wearing the same rig."

Greta said, "Poor Buck. As a Welshman he'll feel right out of it."

"Not he. His mother was a Mackinnon so he's got the best of both worlds, including the Welsh voice. It's the breath of life to Chester to make these occasions as colourful as

possible so we all go along with that. Despite his bulldozing tactics he's done a lot for the district. Come along."

It was certainly a glittering event and Burroughs had seen to it that an adequate number of invitations had been sent out so that there were plenty of partners for those men at the Lodge who had come alone. Nevertheless it was a little exhausting if complimentary to the women that there was no need to miss a dance, but Caleb saw to it that he had more than his fair share with Greta. What fun it was. Due to their practices with Ursie as tutor they now managed a dreamy slow fox-trot, and a romping tango.

He said to the top of her head later, "A born dancer. I believe you could even do the can-can."

She said demurely, "I can. Believe it or not, my mother taught me," then quickly, "but don't dare ever mention it to anyone or I'll never forgive you. I mean it. Bad enough Chester dragging me in for a solo."

"You mustn't waste that gift, Greta. That lilt in your voice. It's a crime to bury talents in the ground. There's Biblical authority for that."

"Idiot! You know darned well that the Biblical talent was a coin!"

He chuckled, "But then of course, Christ always turned everyday things into parables, didn't he? That's a good example."

It was shortly after that in an interval, that there was a stir of more arrivals, very much late-comers, at the far door. She heard Caleb catch his breath and followed his gaze. What a truly beautiful frock, in sapphire blue and silver, something Greta would have loved to be able to wear. But what gave her the most surprising jab of pure jealousy was that the woman who was wearing it, a woman with a rose-petal complexion, and a cloud of dark hair with deeply blue eyes under exquisitely winged brows, was Erica Godsby, Caleb's first love.

There was no doubt that her eyes were searching for him amongst this throng.

The blue eyes sought and found, something quite easy to do because of his height, and Erica began to cross the floor to them.

Chapter Eight

Caleb's response was instant and unexpected. He bent his head to her right ear, said in a whisper, "Be on your guard, trouble approaches . . . head on. Will you do something for me without question? Back me up which ever way I play this and if you don't like it you can smack my face when we get home!"

The astounded Greta found herself saying, "Will do," and the next moment Erica was upon them. She held out both hands to Caleb and said, "What wonderful luck. I hoped you might be here when I was asked to come." She turned a little to Greta, said swiftly and smoothly, "Hullo Greta . . . you'll understand me breaking in like this, of course, after what I told you the other day."

Greta was aware Caleb had got another jolt, as well he might. He dropped the proffered hands almost before they had touched, said abruptly, "What's this? You can't have met."

Erica arched those beautiful brows. "Oh, can't we? Oho! Now I wonder *why* she didn't tell you." She hesitated, added, "I told her all about us so I thought she was bound to tell you."

Greta said, hoping this would be what Caleb wanted, "You wonder why? Because I didn't think it any of my business."

Caleb looked grim. He said, "Knowing Erica as I do, it could be very much Greta's business. I'd rather like to know what was said, so I can then tell Greta the truth." Greta caught her breath. This was flinging down the gauntlet with a vengeance.

Caleb looked down at Greta, said, his expression altering most noticeably, "I'm going to see to it here and now, so that

we get things straightened out. I know this place well enough to find a spot more private. Come on, both of you."

Greta felt as if she were on stage and acted her part automatically. Caleb took her elbow, leaving Erica to follow on.

They found themselves in a small sitting-room of Chester's own. In the middle of the floor he turned Greta round to face Erica who didn't look half as abashed as she should have done. In fact she was sure of herself, all smiles.

Greta felt a shiver run over her which she hoped wasn't apparent. This woman was just too beautiful, breathtaking, in fact. Caleb might be angry now but would it last? Who knew how he would feel later? They had once been engaged to be married and she'd said she ran away with someone else because she felt if she faced Caleb, she wouldn't be able to tell him she was going to marry her boss's nephew, because though she felt she couldn't take the life up here, she loved him so. Powerful stuff.

Erica said, "Then if Greta didn't tell you, I'll have to . . ." Her look challenged Greta who should have said, "Then I'll leave you to it." But an inner voice said to Greta, "No fear . . . Caleb asked you to stand by him and you jolly well will!"

She didn't have to say a word aloud because Caleb not only said it for her, he put out a hand, drew her nearer him. "What ever you've got to say, Erica, Greta stays." He paused to underline that then said deliberately, "You see what ever affects me if it possibly can, affects her too because Greta is very special to my happiness. But I hope it doesn't take too long because Greta and I have been roped in for an item in the next interval."

So Erica had to plunge. "I'm now a widow," she said meaningfully.

Greta couldn't help turning to see Caleb's expression. He looked bland. "What makes you think that's news? You were very careful to put it in our local paper at the time. Though you never made friends in Queenstown."

Erica said quickly, "When I didn't hear from you I thought you hadn't seen it. I couldn't believe that anyone who cared for me as you did, wouldn't have sent a letter of condolence. It would have been only common decency."

Greta could hardly believe what Caleb said next, or the way he said it. She'd never heard a tone from him like that before. His anger was bright and sharp, not sneering. "Since when have you and common decency been on terms, Erica?"

The resultant silence didn't seem to worry him at all. Finally he said, "Never mind, that's another matter but because your mind works that way; I managed to put something right long ago, eleven years ago, to be exact. It was just before I came to Dunedin to see you. This is why I have insisted on Greta being present at this meeting . . . I've had experience of your devious ways."

Erica lost a little of her colour, of her confidence, but she rallied and carried on. She waved a hand. "I can't think what you mean but to think you can feel bitter like this, after all these years makes me realise how cruelly I wounded you, Caleb. Won't you let me say how sorry I am? I've known remorse about what I did for years, even before I lost my husband. To let you come down to Dunedin, to make the arrangements for our wedding, only to have my mother hand you a note from me to say I'd run off to Wellington with Clifton must've seemed like the end of the world to you. So I can't blame you for getting back at me now."

Caleb had a Rock of Gibraltar look about him, Greta thought, not just unyielding but unimpressed. "Oh come, come, I wrote and told you there was no need for you to feel guilty . . . as you had expressed it . . . because I'd already decided I couldn't marry you."

She laughed. "Oh, your letter, what was that but stinking pride? Face-saving. A sort of: 'Don't worry about dumping me, *I* was ready to dump *you*' sort of thing. But it didn't hurt – I knew how you loved me."

His voice was even. Greta was proud of him. His hand slipped down to hers. He found it very cold. His was burningly hot. Her fingers tightened over his. He said, "If there was pride it was on your side. But what the hell, it doesn't matter now!"

She said, "No wonder this girl didn't tell you. She must've thought it unwise to let you know your former fiancée was free again. And she certainly wasn't wearing a ring then."

Her eyes dropped to Greta's left hand which she was holding tightly just above the dropped waist-line. "Why, she's not wearing one now, I thought you meant—"

"You thought right. We haven't shopped for the ring yet." He paused and with that dead-pan expression she knew by now betokened mischief, he said soulfully, "But I *have* bought her a donkey. How much more romantic can you get than buying your lady-love a donkey?"

Greta saw the corners of that well-cut mouth quirk up with restrained laughter, then the devil got into her too and she said with guileless eyes, "Well you see I've lived in some outlandish places with some very quaint customs, and in one of them, the gift of a donkey was the sign of a betrothal gift." And she couldn't help it, she giggled. Caleb's chuckle joined it.

"I don't find that in the least funny," said Erica, looking honestly bewildered.

"Of course you don't," said Caleb. "I don't expect you to. A sense of humour was always missing from your make-up."

To his surprise, Greta rounded on him. "Caleb, that's below the belt. She's probably just got a different sense of humour. Now, this has gone far enough, let's simmer down. Erica didn't know that you, that I – that we—"

The hard glint was back in his eye. "None of your passion for smoothing over awkward situations. I've got the ordering of this, love, not you. What happened between Erica and myself was dead mutton long ago and has no meaning any more. And," he asserted with brazen effrontery, "nothing could upset what Greta and I have going between us."

Greta saw a strange alteration take place in Erica's expression. She suddenly looked forlorn. She said, quite humbly, "Then all I can say is I'm truly sorry for the way I treated you all those years ago. Please remember I was little more than a child."

Caleb wasn't playing a part now. He was genuinely astonished. "What? Little more than a child? Oh, come on. You were exactly five months younger than I was. You were twenty-four. I said devious, and devious you still are! Now I want Greta to have a little pick-up and a few moments to get

her breath back because we're giving a double act and she's got the singing part."

Erica shrugged and seemed to accept the situation. Then she said, the forlorn look back, "Save my face, Caleb. I told Chester Burroughs we were more than friends long ago. Have at least one dance with me." A bid to get him to herself.

Greta saw once more the man she'd met at their first encounter. "No. This is the first public dance Greta and I have been to since we met. Though we'd practised plenty at home. I've had to share her with my men here as it is. And the after-interval waltz is especially mine. I've arranged it with the band."

He grasped Greta's hand more firmly, gestured Erica out in front of him at the exact moment the door opened and Chester came in. "Oh, there you are, Caleb. I was looking for you. It's nearly time for you and Greta. I like to know my performers are right under my eye before I start to announce them. You both seemed to have disappeared."

Caleb said lightly, "Just renewing an old acquaintance and making Erica known to Greta. But now I want to take Greta off for a quick breath of air. Perhaps you'll see Erica back to the ball-room."

"Charmed to," said Chester and offered her his arm.

Greta got her breath back and Caleb his company manner, only a deep twinkle lurking in those dark grey eyes. Presently Caleb led her to the piano. He was to accompany her. He played, always, with a depth of feeling that delighted her.

Chester overdid the introduction of course. Everything was larger than life with Chester. But it came naturally to him. He said: "This doesn't often happen here but we're going to hear a voice that has been heard in some of the great capitals of the world, Gretchen Mountford, yet her maternal forbears came from Ludwigtown."

Greta took it well, sketched a brief bow towards him, but said lightly, "But not on the concert platform, folks, I was usually dragged in as a stop-gap when some more gifted performer failed to turn up. I've sung in tents in impromptu concerts in forests, and the windy spaces of deserts, to relieve

the boredom of men cooped up in dicey situations. Let me make it quite clear I don't want to be asked to perform in local concerts. I'm merely the Kingdom's governess, obliging Chester."

Caleb played a few bars and in her rich true contralto, she began Joyce Kilmer's lovely 'I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree . . .' It was the right song for here in these tree-haunted valleys, watched over by classical mountains. They demanded more of course, and Caleb had prepared for that. A bright, rollicking tune, 'The Kerry Dancers', with Caleb joining in. She waved to them to all come in on the last verse.

When the applause died away Caleb stood up, waved his hand and said, "And now, by special request – mine – this waltz," and the orchestra swung into the irresistible strains of 'If you're in love you'll waltz'.

It was sheer enchantment and she knew that many eyes watched them, knowingly. She said on a thread of sound, "That's rather rubbing it in, isn't it?"

He answered just as quietly. "Stupid, it was arranged long before Erica turned up. Thanks for the backup but it wasn't just scoring-off, you know. It's for real. But now, let's give ourselves over to this." They did. They ended up against Garth and the Fairbairns and became absorbed into their group. Greta's colour was high.

Garth's voice rose above the rest. "Yes, I know. You'd never dream to look at her and hear her sing that she's a wizard with a spanner and an oil-can, would you. Fair go! I'm telling you." All who heard laughed and in that moment Greta encountered a rapier glance from Erica's blue eyes as Burroughs brought her across to them, and knew she had made an enemy.

The drive home was much as Caleb had predicted, with plenty of chaffing and happy recollections. "If only Ursie had been there to hear our governess," said Lance in tones of mock awe.

Greta laughed. "Poor Ursie, she's heard it over and over, *ad nauseam* when we were practising."

Even when they got home there was no time or privacy for comments from two of the main participants in the true drama of the evening, for with the children all cared for, the three couples, joined by Ursie who'd stayed up for a late night film, decided to cook bacon and eggs and sausages in the big kitchen.

Suddenly it was all glorious fun to Greta, she was one of the herd, very necessary to the well-being of this miniature kingdom, walled round by forest and garden trees, and on the rim across the plateau, the everlasting mountains. At hand, or at least little more than an hour's drive away, was a chain of mighty lakes with powerful rivers emptying them into the Pacific two hundred miles eastward . . . those lakes of incredible blue due to some magic refraction of light from the snows that fed them; but on the shores of the nearest one, the tourist gem of Wakatipu to which people from all over the world came, yet had secrets of its own, for on the far shore were enormous sheep-runs and gracious homesteads whose only access was by water.

In a very real way, too, through her mother, her roots were set amongst these wild gorges where long ago, men had adventured for gold. Might her future be here, also? Well, thanks to that audacious performance by the king-of-the-castle, it might well be. How heavenly to think that tomorrow was not a schoolday. There might be a few hours in it somewhere free from other people, for Caleb to explain a little of what lay behind it. She fell asleep on the comforting thought that Caleb had indeed had a lucky escape when Erica had put a way of life before the man she loved.

The men were busy outside nearly all the next morning, and it wasn't till nearly eleven that Caleb returned to the house, saw the old black kettle purring away on the range, filled two mugs with instant coffee, put a couple of pieces of shortbread on a small tray, and said to Greta, "Come on into the study, I owe you some sort of explanation."

She put the anemones she was arranging into the waiting vase any old how, and followed him. He said, "Where's Ursie?"

"Upstairs in her little annexe. Why, do you want her too?"

"Of course not. I don't want to be interrupted." He opened the door that led into the bottom rooms of Ursie's domain and called up, "I've got Greta in the study and don't want to be interrupted so if the phone rings, would you answer it? I'm not available."

Greta was sure Ursie would love to go along with that. Very meekly she followed him in. Apart from the two desks it contained, there was a plain working-table. He put the tray down on it, picked up a bundle of papers, threw them on to the old comfortable couch, and to her surprise set her mug at one end of the table, pulled a chair round for her, seated himself at the other.

"This looks like a serious discussion," she said, and felt a tremor of nervousness run over her. "Am I on the carpet?"

"On the carpet? How could you be after what happened at the Ball, and must've just about taken the legs from under you? But you rose to the occasion most nobly, despite my nerve, and gave me one of the most gratifying clashes of my life, though I won't blame you for thinking me arrogant to make a statement like that! And," his mouth twitched at the recollection, "I did tell you you'd be free to smack my face later, so I'm setting you far enough away to take evasive action if necessary."

She said, quite calmly, "You needn't have bothered. I summed up Erica when she accosted me at the Chalet, so I found myself surprisingly willing to follow your lead. You handled it superbly, Caleb, so as it progressed I became even more willing."

It wasn't often a colour rose in those tanned cheeks and she rightly took it for pleasure at her praise. He looked down then up. "I was mighty afraid, afterwards, that it could have given you a disgust of me. Hardly chivalrous, was it?"

"It wasn't the moment for chivalry. You had been denied the chance of being told face to face she was going to marry this other guy. She hadn't known you were coming down to break it off."

He looked at her sharply. "You did believe that, then?"

"Of course. You aren't the lying type. You'd rather be blunt. No face-saving antics for you. Besides, I had my

own experience to reinforce that, Caleb. You see, I prefer to be direct too. I've told you how it ate into me playing the bereaved fiancée when in another twenty-four hours or less, I'd have given him his ring back. What happened to you was similar. You, to everyone else, were the jilted one, whose prospective bride had run off with someone else. I simply had to play my part because losing her son was enough for his mother to bear. The same thing with Virginia's parents and her sister, a twin no less. Although the mother and father had no idea what they'd been up to, I thought the sister had her suspicions." Their eyes met.

He said, rather awkwardly for so fluent a man, "If you only knew how much I admire you for carrying that through. It must have been hell. It was true heroism."

She got in quickly, "I wasn't looking for admiration. Just that I understand how hard it must have been for you."

His eyes were searching hers. "You haven't asked me why I had decided to ask Erica to release me from our engagement."

"Of course not. That would be prying. I suppose you just suddenly realized it wouldn't work. That sort of thing often happens to other couples. You doubted she would ever settle here. Better a broken engagement than a broken marriage. I had had doubts over Martin too but had shut my mind to them. I was at fault there. I craved a settled existence so much I wouldn't admit to myself that I hadn't found our attachment very satisfying. You did."

"It wasn't that. Oh, that too, lots of doubts but I found something out. Oh, not finding she was playing two of us on her line. No, a piece of sheer mischief. In fact, malice. A girl Erica had gone to school with in Dunedin was marrying a quite wealthy man from Wanaka. He ran tourist accommodation there in a big way. I'd met the girl and liked her. She'd come a bit of a cropper when she was just nineteen. Had been in love with a guy already married. I believe he'd had a helluva life. She ran away with him. They hoped for a divorce. Then his wife developed a terminal disease and the two of them agreed he must return to her. Some new drug arrested it for years and in fairness to him, Elmira left

Dunedin, worked for the man she was eventually to marry. A fine fellow. I never liked the way Erica *would* talk about it. It boiled down to the fact that she was jealous of her friend. This guy adored Elmira and she him. He was wealthy and was buying a very successful complex in Fiji. Erica envied her the life style she was going to enjoy.

"One day, this man drove over the Crown Range to Queenstown and along the mule-track from Drumlogie to see me. Erica had gone to him and told him she thought he ought to know what had happened in Elmira's past. This chap had blown up. How glad I was about that. Told her he'd known of it from the first time he took Elmira out. She'd told him. He had trounced my fiancée and he came to tell me that if Erica went on doing it, he'd take steps about it. Wondered if I could stop her. He was a good bit older than I, and said I might be well advised to have second thoughts. I wasn't as shattered as I might have been because I had already been very disturbed in mind. There had been other things. Devious things. I came to the conclusion I couldn't introduce that sort of thing into our valley. Disharmony and malice. The rest you know. That I went down to Dunedin to have it out with her. It was an almighty relief.

"But in this letter she'd left for me she said she felt terribly guilty, that she knew it would break my heart, but that it was best for me, really. That I deserved someone who *could* take the isolation. I didn't want to stir up the mud again. Not fair to Wade Dennison and Elmira. Like a fool I never told her I'd decided we wouldn't suit, and to spare her the guilt feelings I wrote and said that I had decided she'd be unhappy living here, so had gone to Dunedin to release her, so it was all for the best. Evidently that hurt her pride. Now . . . does that sound logical? I mean logical enough to account for my behaviour last night, involving you like that when you had asked me to slow-pedal?"

"Very logical. I've never felt thankful for my own experience till this very moment. It helps me understand what a position you were placed in, and of course I hadn't liked her when she came to my table – I'd been pointed out to her as the governess here – and seeing she'd

come to Queenstown with the obvious idea of seeking you out . . . and perhaps carried away with the sound of the hunting ranch almost on your doorstep, she was sounding me out. Said you were a one-woman man. Oh, don't swear, Caleb, I wouldn't have been so stupid as to believe that. You'd already made it apparent you weren't." He saw the suspicion of a dimple quiver at the side of her mouth, and her warm brown eyes twinkle.

He got up to come to her, but dropped back into his straight-backed chair. "I'd better control myself. If you knew how I'm feeling . . . let that go. But naturally I'd like to know why you didn't tell me you'd met her."

Her eyes met his quite frankly. "Because how could I know how you would react? I didn't even know if you were aware she was free again. It was over to her. I dared not let my instinctive dislike of her do anything to make her think . . ." her voice tailed off.

He prompted her, a gleam in his eye. "Finish that. I'd very much like to hear the rest of it."

She shook her head. "No. I don't know how you'd react to *that*!"

He chuckled, and said, "You were afraid you'd give away the fact that I'd fallen for you."

"Oh, no . . . you're right off-beam." She had so nearly said she hadn't wanted to have Erica suspect that she, Greta, had feelings about Caleb that she was trying to analyse. She decided a change of subject would serve. "I felt puzzled, Caleb, that you hadn't told me that day in Gretchen's wood, when I confided in you, that you had had a similar experience. Few people could have resisted that."

"You want to know why? Because your experience was far more devastating. To be disillusioned, then bereaved, in a matter of hours. I can only imagine what it did to you, an essentially candid person, to behave as you were expected to behave. It would have been unfeeling to compare my disillusionment to yours. Do you think I can't imagine the necessarily gruelling routine of the identifying, the funerals, and the aftermath of working with colleagues who knew all three of you."

Her eyes widened. "Oh, you do understand, don't you? But it's over. This completely new life was the answer. Change of scene. The old bromide."

His eyes still held her across that length of table. "Was it just the change of scene?"

She hesitated, wished she could reply that it was, but her inherent honesty checked the words on her lips.

He said, "Don't look down, Greta. Tell me truly."

Lovely colour flooded her cheeks. "No. I've got to admit I've found great understanding here."

Suddenly he grinned, breaking the tension. "That's no answer at all, and you know it. But it'll do for now."

She came to her feet, looked at him appealingly.

He said, "I know what happened to you left scars. Couldn't be otherwise. I'll wait for them to heal. Mark time. How's that?"

"It's the way I'd like it. Thank you."

He moved quickly, came round the table, and said, "And thank you for playing up to me in that encounter the way you did. I've been far too much inclined to think I was the master of my fate . . . as if anyone ever is." She turned to precede him out of the room but wasn't allowed to. He caught her in his arms, kissed her. Not a demanding kiss, more one of complete understanding.

As he lifted his mouth from hers she said with a mischievous inflection, "Marking time? Did you say that, or not?"

He shrugged, eyes alight with mischief. "Well, can you think of a more pleasant way of doing just that?"

As they emerged Ursie came out of her annexe door. She said, "Well, don't you think I did well, answering that phone? A very stupid woman. I told her the first time she'd got a wrong number, the second time I advised her to check, the third time I let my exasperation show. When she said again, 'Oh, sorry,' I said to her, 'Look, I think I'll leave this off the hook till you do get the right connection. She wouldn't say the second time the number she wanted. You can usually sort it out if they do that, but she muttered something about crossed lines. I said, that they very rarely get crossed these high-tech

days. Well, that casserole ought to be ready now. Come along."

In the afternoon Greta retired to the schoolroom to set out some work for Monday. Ursie was at the Rogers' place and it sounded as if Caleb and Buck were giving the children rides on the donkeys. She'd nearly finished when the phone rang. There were extensions all over this long house. Greta picked it up, said her name and the voice said, "Oh, I'm so glad I got *you*, Greta."

Unmistakably Erica. Greta felt a little chill of apprehension descend upon her. She said, pleasantly enough, "If you want Caleb, he's out in the donkey paddock but I can call him."

The voice sharpened. "No, I said I was glad it was you. I didn't want anyone else answering. I rang three times this morning and kept getting Ursie. I certainly didn't want *her*."

Greta's voice sharpened too. "What was wrong with you asking her to call me? Though—" she bit back saying Caleb had asked for no interruptions by phone that morning.

"Oh, I wanted it to be private. Ursie listens in. She always did."

Greta said coldly, "I don't want to listen to that sort of talk. I'm fond of Ursie and I just can't imagine that."

"Oh dear . . . but then you're living on the spot and I suppose she thinks you're more suitable, anyway. And you probably find it best to keep on the right side of her. I felt I must ring you. Poor Caleb is still obviously feeling sore about my running away with someone else."

Greta cut in, "Oh, surely not . . . after more than ten years! Men just don't. Look, I don't feel like continuing this conversation. I trust Caleb, I know how he thinks. Do just accept the fact that he had already decided you and he were not meant for each other and had arrived in Dunedin with the express intention of discussing the termination of your engagement."

There was a laugh, the sound of which filled Greta with distaste. "Don't tell me you fell for that. It was purely a face-saver. It's too neat. Coincidences don't happen like that outside the pages of a novel."

There was an edge to Greta's voice. "Haven't you ever heard the saying that truth is stranger than fiction? It's exactly what happened to *me*. In England I'd come to the conclusion that my engagement was far from ideal. My mind was irrevocably made up to end it that night, but my fiancé happened to be on his way back to London when he was killed in an accident. It *can* happen."

There was a little silence, then, "Well, there was no need for Caleb to break ours."

At that moment as she paused, another voice cut in – Caleb's from one of the other points. "But there was, Erica, a very good reason. I said you were devious and this is another instance. Trying to throw a spanner in the works. When I wrote you I didn't tell you why I'd decided to give you up but I will now. I didn't want a woman capable of what you'd been capable of, in my life. In my valley. Listen, Erica, and listen hard. Wade Dennison came to see me, told me how you'd tried to betray your one-time school-mate you were so jealous of. As you know it didn't come off. Elmira had already told him. Incidentally they are the happiest couple with delightful children. I know because my sister and I spent a holiday with them in Fiji. I find I can still feel anger about anyone trying to do a thing like that. That's why I was so determined to break it off. I'd really hoped to have a blazing row with you about it in the hope it might put a stop to any other nasty thing you might think of doing. I simply wouldn't ally my life with a woman so capable of such treachery, such malice. So this is it. Hands off. I'm going to replace this receiver right now." Greta heard the click. It was a wonder Erica had stayed to hear it all. Perhaps she had hoped it was something she could explain. She was still there. Caleb must be at the stable extension because this line hadn't been cut off. Greta stood there stupified, holding the receiver. The voice said quickly, "Greta, are you still there?" Greta said faintly, "Yes, but I don't think—"

"Then allow me to say one thing. What does it feel like to know you are being chosen for your suitability? Because you like the life? Think about that."

Greta came to life. "Well, why not? After all thinking

about your *un*suitability caused you to cut and run, didn't it? Though my guess is it was more to do with dollar signs . . . the nephew heir to a paying concern . . . but aren't I lucky? . . . I get the life I love *and* the man I love! I can hear Caleb coming. Goodbye."

Caleb must've raced across. He heard the phone go down. "Was there some nasty postscript after I hung up? If so—"

Greta shook her head, said fairly lightly, "No, at least nothing that mattered. She was just spitting venom. No, I'm not saying what. Nothing that could possibly matter. Oh, Caleb, I'm glad for the sake of the vulnerable, idealistic young man you undoubtedly must have been that you found her out." Then, "No, Caleb, don't kiss me. I'm not in the mood. I need space about me and clean air. So do you. I can hear the children still in the donkey paddock. Let's join them and have a bit of fun."

She was relieved he hadn't heard her own last remark to Erica. It had surprised even herself. Don't let the drama of Erica's vixenish final attempt to spoil things, jolt you into something you haven't thought your way through yet, though at the time it had seemed the natural thing to say. Anyway, who cared? If it removed Erica from Caleb's life again, it had been well said.

It was impossible to remain in a state of crisis in the donkeys' paddock, especially when Caleb and Lance insisting on having a ride each, in turn on Keziah, their long legs trailing in the grass and Keziah turning an astonished head round looking as if she'd like to bite them, caused such gales of laughter among the children.

The October muster of the sheep was upon them soon. Caleb had remarked quite thankfully that at least they'd get no overflow from the Lodge then so there were compensations in all things.

Greta said, "It will be an entirely new experience for me. I've never seen a large muster before. I'm looking forward immensely to seeing them brought in, even if—" Heavens, she'd nearly said, "Even if I don't like the idea of you being away from the homestead three days and two nights." She

said quickly, "Even if it's a lot of work. Before you came back Buck put some videos through. Slides too, of earlier days. It really fascinated me, that great herd of sheep starting from beyond the plateau right through to the lower slopes of Jagged Ridge, pouring down through every little gully then widening out. The dogs were marvellous each to his or her own job and seeming to enjoy it too, despite Buck saying their pads can get sore on the shingle. The slides were from before his time here, taken, I suppose, by your father?"

"Yes, though a lot were due to Alastair. He was an excellent amateur photographer. Did you see the ones of the cookhouse and old Albie? You did, good. There was a character for you. You'd have enjoyed writing him up. Temperamental as they come, like most sheep-station cooks, but he never failed to satisfy the inner man. That's essential. And prompt. Don't know how he did it at times, before we got the power through, in the sometimes sizzling heat we get. Great place for extremes here. Those two fuel stoves would be going at once, under a corrugated iron roof. In his own line he was a master craftsman. His bread! Makes me hungry to think of it. Sure sliced bread and deep freezes have made it easy for us now, and especially for Ben, at his age, cooking for the men, but Albie's bread was nectar, and of course our butter was home-made then."

She laughed. "You're sounding almost lyrical. I said you had a good touch when I read your report, Caleb. You ought to try your hand on tourist articles."

"Never on your life! Anything that publicizes this place is anathema to me. It's just your newspaper instinct." He looked sideways at her. "Tell me, do you ever feel frustrated? Would like to put all this," he made a wide sweep with one hand, "into words for some magazine?"

She had to be honest. "Sometimes it gets to me, but I work it off in letters to the parents, describing it all. I think it makes them realize how happy I am here . . . that I've got over the trauma of what happened."

He said, "Better tell them that when your father's schedule permits they should join us here for a month or two. I guess your mother would love to see Ludwigtown. I know she left

there at five or six, but she might even meet up with some who'd remember your grandparents. After all, your quarters are more than adequate with quite a large spare bedroom and that modernized kitchen. That way you'd be able to have some privacy as a family. It would do them good to see the different lifestyle their daughter now enjoys. Nothing would make your parents feel happier about you than seeing how you've fitted into the life here."

She flushed with pleasure. "Thank you, Caleb, I've been made to feel so welcome, so necessary." Their eyes met and they both gave way to mirth. She said, "Oh dear, it seems impossible not to remember your first reaction . . . it's almost like making you eat your words."

"Oh, I ate them a long time since. Actually, I suppose it really isn't so long ago, life has changed so much. Life here before I went away, before you came, wench, seems so incredibly distant. I don't know how I existed before."

She was silent. He said slowly, "At least that's how it seems to me. I'm not allowing for the actual short space of time since disillusionment and tragedy entered your life or even since you were in a cosmopolitan ever-changing setting . . . and I expect you to take a humdrum existence like this. However beautiful you find the surroundings what does it amount to after all? And I had the nerve to try to rush you off your feet so soon after the first hostility died down, instead of realizing you needed time. I'm still expecting too much, too soon, I know, but—"

She laughed. "Good job you put that 'but' in, Caleb. You're a bit like the mountain storms that sweep this area . . . as boisterous as the terrain where clouds sweep down and blot out the landscape. Then lift to reveal sunsets almost unequalled anywhere. And torrents pour down hillsides sweeping everything before them, and when the sun comes out you hear the roar of avalanches. No wonder it breeds dynamic, impatient men like you, I often think that."

He seized her arm. "Well, as long as you do think of me, sometimes, when I'm not here, that'll do to go on with. But reverting to the writing, why don't you put flights of oratory like that, down. They oughtn't to be wasted. If not in articles

why not in a book. I mean fiction, a novel. If you do make up your mind your future lies here, I don't want frustrations eating away at you. I mean that, heaven help me. Look, I know I've said too much, too soon. I will *try* to be patient but there'll be moments when eagerness will swamp those good resolves. Bear with me when they do and forgive me. Till you know your own heart, till you feel you can take the remoteness from all you've known. I want you to be sure. I won't be content with less than total commitment."

She felt shaken by the force of his utterance. But she managed to say levelly, "Thank you, Caleb, it needs a lot of thinking out." She moved away.

She sat by her own fire that night. Had said she needed to work alone. That was true enough. Living such close lives wasn't easy. It wasn't what he thought. She *wasn't* grieving, regretting. She simply must be sure this time that it wasn't the everlastingness of this place that attracted her, the lodestar of a permanent dwelling-place. Otherwise it wasn't fair to Caleb. She even mistrusted the strong physical attraction . . . magnetism really, between them. She was so aware when he was with her of feelings she had hardly even known before.

Fortunately they were very busy. The children were accustomed to having a few days' break at shearing-time, she had been told, so she was falling in with that, adding an hour to their usual school periods now, and would, also, during the time the men were on the muster. Once the gang arrived, the older children would take over some of the men's chores.

The Saturday before the shearing, Greta spent happily redding up, a term her Scots forebears had passed on to her mother, her own domain. She loved this end of the sprawling nooks-and-corners house. It wasn't quite as old as the rest of it but still gave her the feeling generations of children had been taught here, that it had always been a happy habitation. It was more Greta's very own than anywhere she'd ever lived before.

Treasures from the colourful past had found their way here, pictures of bygone shearing-times, of pastures that then had known the rustic beauty of lambs at play beside their mothers.

This was eloquent testimony to the more traditional farming that had gone on in the pioneer years before a succession of disastrous springs when losses had been in thousands, had forced them into stocking wethers only. Then, much later they had brought in the deer as markets opened up. Versatility had been the saving of this high-country estate where even the plateau was above sea-level. Here in the cupboards were the indoor games of generations of other children, still fascinating to those of now, on wet days.

There were enough Austrian mementos to strike a kindred chord with Greta. She loved the beautifully carved wooden frame that held a faded likeness of the first Gretchen's parents. On the back, barely decipherable, it said, 'Gretchen mit Liebe'. Well over a hundred years old, it spoke to Greta of the pangs it must have cost this wonderful old pair to say a permanent goodbye to a loved daughter. The first Caleb, nearing fifty, had had this strong impulse to visit this Austrian gold-miner who had returned home after winning a modest amount of gold from the Arrow. Caleb had fallen in love with his young daughter. Had married her there, brought her to New Zealand. The world had shrunk since then in terms of journeying. The voyage had taken weeks. What had her parents felt, kissing her goodbye, knowing they'd never had the money to go out to see her? She had been very happy, all the stories stressed that, but she must, at times, have suffered homesickness.

Greta hoped that those parents had other children, to provide them with grandchildren, who would be cousins to the ones in far-off New Zealand. She perceived the trend of her thoughts, seeing a link between the present-day Caleb's ancestry and her own in terms of nationality, and reined in her wandering mind. She hung the picture back on its hook.

A knock sounded on her door. Jason, bearing marks of an unhappy encounter with some hectic-looking paint. A violent pink, almost cerise. He was obviously in trouble. He looked at her beseechingly.

Chapter Nine

There was one long moment when Greta looked as appalled as Jason. His hair, hands, and face were indescribable. Then she saw a lip quiver. "Can you help me, Greta? I'm afraid Mum's going to be awful mad. Could I get most of it off, here in your laundry? It won't drip on the floor, I got most of it off with the newspaper. I mean all the runny stuff."

She gave a choke of laughter. "If only it was all runny. The rest looks like quick-drying to me but—"

"Oh, it can't be quick-drying. It's that good paint of Caleb's. But it's awfully gummy. My eyelashes feel stuck."

"I'll help. No mother with a toddler could cope with this. But it'll take time. Just a moment though, I'll put paper on this vinyl floor in case there are drips as we scrub."

"Gosh, you're a sport!" said Jason, looking more cheerful.

She considered it. "I'd better slip your outer things off very carefully, and downwards, because it'll come off your skin easier than off clothes." She dropped T-shirt and shorts on to more paper, looked at him in briefs and said briskly, "You'll have to strip, Jason. Don't mind me. Teachers and nurses are like mothers."

"Oh, I don't mind you at all. I would some people."

"How in the world did you manage to get most of it on hair and face?"

"I dodged when that stupid fowl flew up on the dropboard when I was pouring the paint into a smaller tin. I was standing it on newspaper too like Dad does. But the newspaper came in handy . . . I bent right backwards when it poured over me. Just as well, with clothes the price they are," he added sagely.

"Dropboard? You mean in the fowlhouse? But what on earth—?"

Jason said, pausing as he tried to wriggle out of his briefs without too much contact with his hands, "I was being good, and look what happened. It just isn't fair. I knew Caleb was mad about wasting that paint and when Ben told me he was rubbing the front of the fowl-house down ready to paint it, I thought I'd do the rubbing down before he got a start and use up the spoiled paint. But it kinda went wrong—"

She interrupted, "Look, I think we'll get you into the tub before you tell me the rest. I've got the water just about right. Now you'll have to let me lift you in, and don't touch the taps, I'll do it at arms-length or I'll be as messed up as you, so be ready to sort of spring in."

A voice behind them said, "No, I'll do that." And Caleb strode across the floor. The other two yelped.

Greta said, "How long have you been there?"

"Quite a few moments. You were very diplomatic, didn't embarrass him a bit; now I know lots of explanations are due, young man, but we'll get the paint off you first."

Greta ran off and got a hair-washing hose and spray from her bathroom. "Hope this isn't perished, I saw it in a cupboard once – I think some governess must've used it before the shower was put in." It worked all right and a steady stream of warm water cascaded over the thick thatch of tow-coloured hair and dripped pinkly into the lavish suds below. They both worked at it, Greta gently wiping his lashes free and Caleb doing good work with an old floorcloth handy. Jason was greatly relieved when both of them burst into irresistible laughter. "You're *both* good sports," he announced and in his relief, gave Caleb an affectionate hug which the king-of-the-castle tried too late to avoid. He made a swipe at his chest with the very pink floorcloth, which didn't improve things, and tears of laughter began rolling down Greta's cheeks.

Caleb said quickly, "Save thanking me, Jason, till you're rinsed." They kept letting the water away till it became the colour of a fading rose. Greta began using a nailbrush on his hands. "Now, tell us all about it."

Jason's blue eyes filled with tears and overflowed. "It was to be a surprise for you, Caleb, a luv'ly one. I knew you were worried about the paint Rowena spoiled and that was partly my fault too, because I didn't latch the door. You said it cost nearly a hundred dollars . . . I knew it would be no good for the picket fence. Ben said that had to be white. I asked him but didn't tell him what I planned. I just said I'd finish the rubbing down for him. The wood was all splintery from not being painted. Ben said I'd made a good job of it and he'd paint it after his weekend off." Jason added smugly, "I've been doing extra feeding-out for letting the fowls out, so the other kids don't know anything about it. Gee I was glad it's only a small fowl-house. It was hard work. I thought you wouldn't have to know till it was finished because it's hidden behind the big macrocarpa hedge. *And* I even remembered to put paper down before I put the lid down and then what happened? That awfully scatty Rhode Island Red flew up on to the dropboard where she'd no business to be, in the daytime, she ought to have been laying an egg. And the tin fell over on me because I was bending down putting the big one back underneath. So at least it's not all wasted. There'll be enough to finish the job."

Caleb looked aghast at this information, but wiped the expression off as Greta looked at him imploringly. But he said, "You mean you've already started it?"

"Yes, I had only four boards left to do." Caleb managed to look sympathetic.

Greta said, "You poor thing, how disappointing. You couldn't foresee what happened. I was going to say it's the perversity of inanimate things, but it doesn't apply. Nobody could call that hen inanimate." She thought Caleb deserved a medal for not looking more horrified at the idea of a cerise fowlhouse and the thought of what Ben would say when he returned.

"I'll – I'll be pleased to give you a hand, Jason, seeing you've lost so much time. Oh, I'll let you do the painting but I'll keep the hens at bay. No, don't scratch your hair, it's still a little bit pink at the roots. You'll get it in your nails again."

They had to use a little turpentine on his hands, then garden soap, then rinsed the last lot off. Caleb lifted him out, swathed him with a towel, and said, "There, the others are still busy with the donkeys, they needn't know a thing about it if there are only four boards to go. And I'll break it to your mother later, though the clothes are very little smeared which is a miracle. So you can get into them again."

Jason, much relieved, hurried ahead of them; Caleb said, "I'll tell Ben Jason isn't to be set back over this. But I'll get rid of the rest of that paint promptly. I'll pour it in the tip and cover it over. He might start on the dogs' quarters next and they're in full view."

They ducked through the arch in the hedge and the full strident sight burst upon them. They maintained their composure, went inside the run, with Jason out of hearing in the hen-house. Greta said, "We're always hearing about colour therapy, who knows, this may improve their laying average amazingly."

Caleb said, "More remarks like that and I won't be able to help some unkind laughter. My ribs are already sore with holding it in. I think it might rather put them clean off laying."

They came up close and Caleb said in a tone of assumed pleasure, "Well, top marks to you, young feller-me-lad, you made a good job of that sanding down. That surface is perfect. You've not skimped the edges either, I always hate doing that." Jason glowed.

Caleb said in an aside to Greta, "I think you'd be the best one to break the news to Jane, after all. Say it's a fine job. Ask her for a change of clothes for him and we'll get those smears off his top and shorts tonight. He can stay to dinner with us. Being Saturday we're having it at midday of course. How about that, Jason?"

As Greta went away, she looked back, saw the big boss and the little boy, industriously absorbed and a strange feeling swept over her. She told herself it was admiration for his forbearance.

Jane was horrified at first, then relieved she hadn't had to cope with it and also that Caleb had taken it so well. Greta

said, "I've been told to go to the donkey paddock on the way back and tell the others Jason has done a splendid job on it. It seems they knew nothing of it, just that he was spending extra time cleaning things there to make amends for all the plants Ben lost."

To her surprise Jane gave Greta a hug. "You perfect darling! You keep such good discipline, yet you understand their childish wilfulness too."

"Oh, I'm *not* perfect, Jane. Sometimes I'm impatient when I should be understanding. Or don't listen when I should. Or don't analyse some unusual behaviour. Which disappoints me in myself. With the kids all in the one room and at so many differing stages, it's complicated. But I love them all. I couldn't have borne it if Caleb had lost his temper with Jason, because even in the midst of the youngster's humiliation, he was disappointed Caleb wouldn't get the lovely surprise he'd planned."

They both collapsed into the giggles. Then Jane said, "But Caleb is lucky. You make a wonderful pair."

Greta said quickly, "I think you mean team, not pair. It's a working partnership, that's all."

"Oh, is that what it is?" asked Jane. But Greta had fled.

The muster went well, though Greta was surprised how she longed to have Caleb and his men back at the valley. They were spending two nights at the huts. Garth had explained to her that as the forecast was so good, they'd put time in rounding up the long-fleeces. "The rogue ones who avoid us with the cunning of the devil, sometimes twice in a row, and take to the bush in the gullies. Mostly away beyond Infinity Hill."

She knew by now each man had his own beat, bringing them down from the foothills with his own team of dogs. She'd said to Caleb, "Do you enjoy it?" He said, "I always do, even when problems crop up. I was brought up to it, but like my father and Alastair before me, I'm always glad when the men are safely in. They know the hazards but there are always dangers, shingle-fans that can be set moving and some mighty stiff bluffs. Not as dangerous as once, with

the mixed mobs we ran then, though the ewes and lambs were in the nearer paddocks, of course, but occasionally with weather threatening, or late frosts, we'd take risks. Worst was the chance of leaping down on to what you thought were bare rocks and finding them covered in black ice. I'm always glad when we get them streaming on to the plateau and meeting up. But this has been a wonderful year. We've got a fine gang of shearers coming too, and bringing their own cook. It's too much for Ben now, though he's not above pitching in if we have an emergency. And he's even got the tact not to butt in on the cook's territory with tales of how it was managed in the older tougher days."

But now they were away. They had left early, the pack-horses well-laden. The huts were stocked with bare necessities, mostly survival stuff and were always left open in case of lost trampers some, at times, trapped by snow. It had been a great sight to see them winding up the cutting towards what she thought of now as Caleb's Profile, dogs at heel, dust rising from the hoofs. She got some excellent work done in the schoolroom and even helped Ursie stock up the freezers with loads of cookies and fill the pantry tins with gingernuts and shortbread. "I always do this in case some cook lets us down. If you can at least supply their smokos for a start it's a help. Isn't it odd how we still say smokos, though these days, even amongst a big gang, the percentage of smokers is very small? The campaigns must be working. Good thing too, because time was when we didn't realize the danger. It's a tough thing to break off, I know, although I was only ever a light smoker. Greta, those quick savouries you made the other week, would you make some now, only in muffin tins not the patty-pans? The men would scorn those dainty ones. You know what I mean? Circles of bread-and-butter pressed into the tins butter-side down, and filled with mashed potato and tinned salmon? But this time you can use my land-locked salmon from the lake. I preserved a terrific lot last year.

"They'd keep till Christmas, frozen, if we don't need them now. It's too hot for much baking then and we do tend to get a lot of visitors now that road's gone through. Good heavens,

what's come over me? I nearly said that dratted road! Yet at the bottom of my heart I do thank Chester for making that possible. Though I wish Caleb hadn't thought it incumbent on him to allow the overflow to occupy the chalets. Not that they've ever disturbed the peace much. They're the cream of tourists, just wanting to get away from it all."

On the last day of the muster Ursie said to Greta, noticing the longing glances she kept casting up the side of the valley, "Why don't you ride Dickon up the cutting? It's a marvellous sight from the Gap. It's my guess they'll be converging on to the plateau by now." Greta was well at home in the saddle now so she consented gladly. How different it would be with Caleb under his own rooftree tonight. Her pulses quickened at the thought. How drab these last few days had been, not hearing his step, his tap on her door calling her to dinner, reading out from the newspapers that were sometimes a few days old, commenting on events on TV and radio . . . sitting down at the piano dashing off a rollicking tune, occasionally some wistful love-song, then swinging round suddenly at the end, with the audacious glint in his eye that meant he was daring her to match his mood. Oh yes, he played a waiting game all right and his very confidence was helping her to release her mixed-up feelings about her obsession for a settled home.

Dickon was already saddled because she'd gone for a canter before breakfast when she had awakened too early and needed to ride off this annoying restlessness. It was marvellous now to be on her own. Sometimes here there were times when she found it over-populated. She laughed out loud at the absurdity. It was because the children constantly included her in their activites, the after-school ones, showing her their favourite nooks, pools, caves. She was becoming adept at climbing trees to look at nests, leaving them undisturbed, at identifying bird-calls strange to her till now, having fun with them on the roundabouts, swings and bars. Even going fishing with them though she never got over her dread of baiting hooks or thinking with pity about some silver-finned denizen of the limpid waters of the streams, about to be caught on those hooks; climbing up the cutting,

experimenting with the distance needed from the Takiroa Rock before it would fling back its echoes. It was a long slab sunk where it had lain from time immemorial, smooth, planed by glacial action Its name fitted it: *Taki* meaning sound, *roa* long . . . therefore the-long-rock-that-echoes. She wondered had it ever been used in the long-ago, by Maoris signalling to a distant tribal group that they were nearing the valley camp, perhaps after a long trek to the West Coast for greenstone, the New Zealand jade, so valuable to these virile people for their weapons, their ornaments. You were always conscious of the colourful past here . . . the sounds of the donkeys' bawling grew fainter and fainter. They always resented her riding off on Dickon.

Bell-birds and *tuis* chimed from trees near the track, because many of them were berry-bearing and some fruit had lasted this year. Flax-flowers could be seen amongst the trees too, for the hone-eating birds to dip their tongue-brushes into for nectar. In the main the sound of Dickon's hooves drowned out the piping notes of the smaller birds but you were always aware of the movements in the leaves and the ceaseless flitting from bough to bough.

She went through Hatchet Gap, sketching a gay salute towards the weathered schist rock, and came through the dark shadow of it into almost blinding sunshine on the plateau, *so* blinding that at first she couldn't see anything definite, then gradually she could discern what she took to be a distance haze before Infinity Hill. Then as her eyes grew accustomed, and she pinpointed where the barking was coming from, she saw it was dust, kicked up by thousands, literally, of Merino hooves travelling across this flat area. Then behind and above the vanguard, just as Ursie had described it, from all the other deep-gullied hills, narrowing triangles of sheep looking for all the world like tapioca being poured from a basin. Her eyes searched and found, she was sure, Caleb among the darker forms of the riders. Yes . . . she was sure that was Caleb on Ajax. The roared-out commands from the shepherds to the dogs couldn't be identified at this distance.

She wheeled Dickon round. What ever happened they wouldn't want anyone riding towards the mobs that were

being expertly moulded into one by men and dogs working as a team and spreading out. It would be unthinkable to scatter and confuse them.

Her heart was light as she rode down . . . the muster was nearly over, every horse and shepherd accounted for . . . the master of house was nearly home! Ben would have the dog-tucker ready. She herself must give Ursie a hand. The single men were eating at the house tonight because Ben was busy in the cookhouse boiling and roasting the meat that would be served cold to the shearers tomorrow for lunch but the rest of the time the shearers' cook would take over. Salads and beetroot would be served with it, and buttered bread and rolls. Hot dinner was served at night. These men had big appetites.

Ursie had said: "Here's where I stop being nostalgic for the home-made bread of yester-year and take out the sliced bread with a blessing on it. For sure we had a slicer but even that took time. Emergencies were always cropping up and everyone had to pitch in. Caleb's mother was marvellous. I'm glad she's got an easier life now, living near Judy up north."

Greta cantered easily into the paddock, removed Dickon's saddle, went across and stroked Keziah's and Esau's noses, to soothe their hurt feelings, made her way kitchenwards. There she stared . . . Ursie was at the big table opening umpteen jars of fruit bottled in the autumn, apricots, peaches, stewed apple. "I thought we weren't opening that till after breakfast, ready for the cook, and over at the cookhouse."

Ursie turned, as near exasperated as Greta had ever seen her. "That A.1. cook we've heard so much about has dislocated his shoulder over some stupid bet with the men at the station they finished up at this morning. There's some sort of gym there and he was doing a big skite on the vaulting horse. The stories I've heard about his cooking, I was looking forward to seeing him in action! These preserves were just for the first lunch, with the jellies and Spanish creams I made. Thought my responsibility would be over then. But now we'll have to make pies as well for the night meal."

Greta too looked aghast. "Have we got enough ready-made pastry in the freezers?"

"For some, yes, because the two wives have some too but all in just small packs. We used to make the pies in huge roasting-pans, with at least three pie-funnels, so I'll have to make a vast amount of pastry tonight. I could kill that show-off of a cook. I did want you to find your first shearing on the easy side."

"Why me?"

"Well, just in case—" Ursie stopped, looked flustered.

"In case what? Thank heaven we stuck to giving the children time off. So why worry about me?"

Ursie looked up, the exasperated expression changing to a mischievous one. "Well, let that go. I had my reasons. My tongue runs away with me."

Greta decided the less she probed the better. She said, "I'll pop one of your aprons over my slacks, and get going. How would it be if I rubbed a huge amount of butter into flour and sugar for apple crumbles . . . it takes far less time than pastry. I'll just scatter it on top of hot fruit and brown it on top. We could chop up some of those apricots and peaches small and make crumbles of them. I reckon the men'd like them as well as pies. And Ben's got loads of rhubarb ready just to pull . . . that'd save a lot of peeling if we haven't enough cooked apple."

Ursie's harassed face lit up. "You're a gem. I can see that when your mother *was* home from flitting about these diplomatic posts she trained her daughter in the way she should go."

"Of course she did. Wasn't she a Klausner from Ludwig-town or descended from them, what ever it is. That makes women good cooks! There were generations of thrifty housewives behind her. We had some very poky kitchens in some flats but she revelled in them. Now, let's get at it. How's our dinner for the boys tonight? Oh, great, casseroles can look after themselves. Let's serve dinner in the dining-room tonight. So we can have this huge table to ourselves for producing tomorrow's big effort. I couldn't bear to have to clear it away. Then start again tonight. Even

after they get the sheep down, they'll have a fair bit to do, I guess?"

"Sure will. They always fill the covered yards even if the forecast is good. Among mountains you can never tell. It's like Bedlam let loose though they all know what they're doing. And if we appear to have got on amain with the emergency preparation, it'll set them up no end. As for finding you pitching in like this, they'll be lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Greta burst out laughing, ladling basinfuls of flour out of the huge bins in the pantry. "To hear you, no one would ever think you too were once a governess here liable to be called on in every emergency. I've heard tales, even about the old-time sheep-dips."

"Go on with you. Greta, there's nowhere enough butter softened for rubbing in and if you put it in the oven it's bound to melt too much, and I'm using the blender on the cake mixer. So how about taking the butter off those shelves . . . not the freezer, you could grate it in, same as I showed you I do with my scones. With the fruit heated beneath, it would soon blend in."

"What a wonderful idea. I'm beginning to enjoy myself. Now I'm off to pull the rhubarb." Soon they heard the resentful bleating, in fact bawling, of thousands of wethers, hot and footsore, forced to exchange the glorious peace and sustenance of mountain pasturing for this indignity and hustle.

Finally Caleb erupted into the kitchen, starting to say: "I thought Greta would at least have come out to see what was happening at the sheds . . ." when he eye caught the activity of the scene. "I suppose that blasted cook's gone on a bender? I thought he sounded too good to be true. Oh, hell, what are we going to do?"

Ursie said crisply, "We've got it all in hand so keep cool. Look at Greta, flour to the elbows and brimming with ideas. I hope you do realize how lucky you are! She did go on up to the cutting . . . yes, all right, Greta, *I* suggested it, though what that matters I don't know, and she returned to find me panicking. She's got a head on her shoulders, that one. To say

nothing of ideas in her brainbox. But then her grandmother was a Klausner from Ludwigtown."

"And you can't get a higher accolade than that," said Caleb, looking across the big table at Greta. "As you might guess, Ursie was born at Ludwigtown."

He started to come round the table. Greta waved him away. "Keep back, have you any idea how filthy you are! And you look as if you've been rolling in the tussock. I don't want straws in my crumble."

"Well, that's a fine welcome." He laughed. His black singlet was wet with sweat, a grimy mark showed across his forehead where his hat had been, tufts of wool clung to his trousers, and even to his dark brown hair, but he was bronzed and virile, every inch a man.

What a perfectly corny thought, Greta said to herself, you're getting primitive, my girl. Animal magnetism, that's what it is!

Ursie said, "And don't forget the men must be told to moderate their language tomorrow, we'll be helping Ben."

"They'll do it automatically," retorted Caleb. "You won't mind the occasional lapse, will you, Greta? Like one of them saying: 'Gosh, we've got a bloody good-looking cook this time, guys.'"

Ursie said, "Now be off with you and be sure to use the outback shower!"

"As if I ever use any other at times like this. You've never got out of the habit of bossing me round, in and out of the schoolroom, have you, Ursie darling?" Ursie waved her rolling-pin at him and he departed laughing.

Later Ben, Garth, Jock, Dexter all came in, the boys with shining wet hair and weather-roughened faces. They appreciated the dining-room setting, to say nothing of venison casseroles and jacket potatoes, followed by a huge baked jamroll. They took their dishes out to the kitchen, rinsed them under the sink taps, and stacked them in the washer, whereupon they were waved out of it by Ursie to let her and Greta get on. They worked to half an hour short of midnight confident they could at least cope and knowing Myrna and Jane would be up early cooking scones and pikelets.

It was a five a.m. start, a hearty breakfast, then across to the cookhouse carrying jars of dressing, early tomatoes that had come through from Queenstown by the case, hard-boiled eggs and spring onions. Ben had a working-bench piled with lettuces, well hearted-up for this time of year, and radishes. The cooked silverside, haunches of venison and legs of mutton were in the out-sized fridge over there, and well-sharpened knives were at the ready. The hands were all out in the yards and the modern woolshed with its raised platform of shearing stands and ramps, and the enormous turntable for the fleecies to sort the wool out and tear off the poorer fringed ends, all dirty, was waiting, with the most amazing polish on it, due, Greta had found out long ago, to the lanoline in the wool.

Thankfully they were ready when the fleet of dusty station wagons arrived. As Greta caught the first comment, "The cook's no great loss after all," she caught Caleb's eye as he entered with the men to sit down at the trestle tables while the women poured and Ben brought over meat ashets of sandwiches, and the buttered stuff. Then it was all go, a serious business, though enjoyment in it too, each man anxious to keep his tally up and with pride in his work that Greta found inspiring though no doubt they'd have laughed had she called it that to them.

The children did their bit, fetching and carrying and at times allowed to hurry the sheep along the wooden races. She was glad when one older man, grizzled and muscular, said to Ursie, "Grand to have you back in the team again. Takes me back to when Hamish and Dougal were alive, aye, and Alastair too." She liked that, again that sense of continuity. She didn't look at Caleb, at the other end of the table. She knew by now, that though he often mentioned Alastair, it still hurt. She had sometimes seen him look away swiftly when he was mentioned. Ursie had said once, "They were closer than some brothers. I often thought there was as strong a bond between them as I've seen between twins."

It was fascinating as time wore on, to see the paddocks filling up where the newly-shorn wethers were released. They looked trim and white and cooler, ready for the

summer ahead. Summers could be extremely hot here, like Swiss summers, and both places had extremes of climate. In a lull in the preparations she said, thinking Ursie was at her elbow, as she stood at the far door, gazing at the shorn ones, "It's incredible how relieved they look. What different expressions now, and despite the huge numbers some of them look quite individual." She couldn't mistake that guffaw for anyone's but Caleb's. She turned quickly, reddening. "You'll think me a twit. I know with flocks like this you're hardly likely to do things on the Biblical pattern . . . knowing each by name, but I'm sure they've got personalities, if you had time to get to know them."

He looked down on her, the deeply grooved lines in those craggy cheeks softening with an indulgent amusement. "I sure know they've got personalities all right, if not names. There's one big brute over there who's quite as obstreperous as an old ram we used to have who was a holy terror. But a damned good sire. This one actually butted me this morning, and took the legs from under me coming in from the rear. Then to make my humiliation complete he skipped over me and his hooves raked my chast." He pulled his black singlet down and she saw the hair was crusted with blood. He forestalled her by saying: "It's okay. We've plenty of stuff on hand in case of infection, and we've all had tetanus injections, but it was a lighter moment for the gang. Always is when something happens to the boss. You're doing a great job, girl. I just wish Erica could see you, though heaven forbid she ever gets the chance again."

Before she thought Greta said, "I'll say! It would give her another opportunity for asking what it feels like to be chosen for suitability."

He took her up immediately. "When did she say that?"

She kept her tone light. "Oh, it didn't matter. It was when she heard your phone go down. I told you she was just spitting venom."

He said roughly, "Then I can only hope you didn't believe her."

A ripple of laughter escaped her, and she said suavely, "Of course not. Don't you realize how convinced I am of my own

personal charm . . . look at me! Cleopatra and Helen of Troy had nothing on me . . . I copped a big splash from that huge bowl of beetroot when Ben nearly dropped it and I saved it; I'm all dish-water and splashes of grease and smell of onions. How could I think that?"

He flicked her cheek. "Well, if ever that rankles, what Erica said, remember our moonrise – and a few other kissing-times."

She gave him a push, and said, "Be off with you. Someone could hear. Ben's already looking this way."

"Oh, you can do no wrong in Ben's eyes." And as he disappeared in the direction of the shearing-shed he turned to say over his shoulder, "Nor in mine." Perhaps that was why she suddenly felt much less tired.

What a mixture these men were. One thing was common to them all, though, they knew how to work, old and young. That would stand them in good stead all their lives, the young, coming to terms with the ethics of work . . .

Towards the end of the second day Caleb said to her, "You're standing up to this so well, I've found the nerve to ask something else of you. If there's a break from time to time, see if you can spare a few words of advice for young Fergus Rigby. His mother's a widow and he's determined to put himself through next year at Varsity without taking a penny more from her. This should've been his third year but you know how tough our fees are now . . . it's always on the news, and he doesn't want to saddle himself with a student loan from the Government. So he made up his mind that at one thing or another, he'd earn enough this year for next. He's doing an Arts Course with a tend towards journalism. Ursie told him you were a journalist. He's too shy to ask you himself. Do speak to him when you get a chance and if you're not too dead-beat tonight, if you could give him a few hints, for, say, half an hour, I'd be grateful."

"Of course. Could I ask him over home? He'll need jobs with wages of course, but I know how he could add to his income if he's prepared to work nights or weekends. Sometimes young ones with literary leanings don't see the

obvious. They go for the highbrow magazines and journals and neglect the best field of all, the newspapers. After all, *they* are published daily, reach a far wider readership, and pay quite well. Many a successful writer has cut his or her teeth on them. I know casual work isn't as plentiful as it once was so anything extra could help. If in off-times he can fill in with a few articles it'll stop him getting depressed. That is, if a guy has the sense to slog at producing stuff – contemporary stuff – not slick but of common interest, he could make more than peanuts. Get him over tonight when they've relaxed a bit." She stopped. "Not that I expect *you* to be as enthusiastic as me, remembering the way you—"

He groaned. "Will you never forget that terrible gaffe I made? Ever since I knew that marvellous article on Buckler's Hard was yours, I've felt completely different. In any case my attitude was coloured by an unfortunate incident over there when I thought a young female journalist was less than compassionate about an horrific accident. That's in the past, believe me. This king-of-the-castle has learned a lot since a certain newspaper woman with a ready and convincing tongue came to live here."

Her dead-pan expression could have rivalled one of Caleb's. "I don't recall you saying a ready tongue. You said *shrewish!*"

"And so it is. Though only to me, I notice. Why is that? Is it a sort of defence mechanism? I'd like to think it was."

She wouldn't ask against what. She said, "You'd better be off. They'll think you're dodging."

He turned as he went off, and said, "They wouldn't think it was dodging . . . just dallying with the most glamorous cook we've ever had. Not a man-jack among them would blame me."

Fergus Rigby, some hours later, presented a very different appearance from in the shed; Caleb brought him in, all sunburn, gingerish hair and eager blue eyes. Fergus looked appreciative as he gazed round the study. "Generations of books here, I'd think. What a marvellous atmosphere."

Caleb nodded. "Some were even brought out from another

culture. Austrian. The first Gretchen knew she couldn't live without books and though she could speak a little English, she couldn't read it. I'd never part with them."

Fergus was thrilled. "Mother has often talked about the history of this place. Goes back to the gold-mining days, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and each generation left its mark and will continue to do so, I hope. Gretchen brought that cuckoo clock out."

"I didn't realize there were two Gretchens. Named after her, I suppose?"

Caleb gestured towards his governess. "She's the other one, Greta for short. Very fitting that she has far-back roots in Ludwigtown and Saltzburg too. I'll get an article by her that you'd be interested in. I read it in London and went down to see what she was writing about, never dreaming that by the time I got back to New Zealand, she'd be on the staff."

He came back with the Hampshire article, and said, "Would it bother you, Gretchen, if I sat in on this? I'm interested. I feel I don't know half as much of the newspaper world as I should." A pause, then, "But I'm learning fast."

Her tone was as smooth as cream. "You certainly are. No, you won't worry me a scrap, but I'd like to sit up at the table with Fergus opposite, so he can scribble any hints down, and if you take the couch, I'll hardly know you're there when I get on to my favourite subject." She warmed to Fergus's enthusiasm instantly.

Greta then went thoroughly into basic rules and hints that she'd jotted down after their meal. Good, solid sensible stuff, Caleb thought. She had the tact to say, "You probably know many of these things, Fergus, but I'm bringing them before you in case there are any points you overlook asking me about, though do bring up a few questions of your own when I get through these. And remember, I don't pretend to know all about journalism. One is continually learning."

Questions and answers were revealing and stimulating. Then Fergus said, "I'd better not stay too long. You'll both want to hit the hay soon, and I don't want the guys to think I'm favoured. They know what I aim to do and haven't tried to take the mickey once. Anyway, I told them you were going

to give me some hints, Greta. Thought it best. No thanks, Caleb, no coffee. I'll take it back with the gang." He grinned and departed.

Caleb said, "Thanks. Like I said, I'm broadening my views. And this gives me the nerve to ask you something. I wanted to but wasn't sure I should dare."

"Do you want me to write something up for you? I'd love to."

"No, the opposite. Ask you if you had already written something. Know how we discussed pen-names. How you said most can be traced back to real names?" She nodded. He continued: "Well, you said once that Chester Burroughs was a hard man to say no to. So I'll understand if in this case you found it *too* hard. I even thought it sounded like you, and it's good, though I didn't exactly welcome it. But you didn't know me, and my views then, about not exposing this station to too much publicity." From under papers on his desk he took out a travel brochure and handed it to her.

She gazed at it. It was folded back at a full-page spread and on the opposite side were some unmistakable photographs of the valley. Bold letters announced **Caleb's Kingdom**, then smaller, '*Come and see this archaic survival of feudalism in New Zealand for yourself, less than a score of miles from one of the finest and most luxurious Hunting Lodges in unsurpassed scenery.*' Her eyes dropped to the by-line. It said Elliot Greene. She burst out laughing, "Oh no, not me, but I don't wonder you thought so, Greene is so like Greta, and then Elliot too. I know Elliot Greene. He does all sorts of articles for magazines, and they certainly are mainly on travel. I'd no idea he'd even been here. I wish I'd seen him, but I'd have warned him off this. It would be the *bulldozing* Chester. He'd play up the idea of you letting the chalets be used and say of course you wouldn't mind. It *could* be long before I arrived on the scene because things really take time to get into print. This is a London travel brochure. Then it would take time for it to be circulated here. I've got a clipping somewhere of an article Elliot did on Versailles that took my fancy. I'll hunt it out because it's got his photo on it, so you'll be sure it's not me. But did Ursie never say he'd been here to

write it up? Oh, I get it. He'd be one of the crowd on one of the open days, and they all take photographs madly."

Caleb said, "You don't have to show me. I wouldn't dream of not believing you."

She flushed with pleasure. "Thank you. I appreciate that. The reason I said that – about Chester being hard to say no to, was because someone told him I'd been a journalist and he thought I'd have access to that particular world and when I turned that down, he said well why not for one of the airline magazines? I didn't know you then but I point-blank refused, and kept refusing till I got really mad and told him it would be an infringement of privacy to any absentee station-owner and that in any case I had no wish to see this turned into some sort of dude ranch. Oddly, when I lost my block, he just accepted it. Rather a sweetie in some ways. But he ought never to have asked Elliot to do it without permission."

She looked up at him frankly. "But I don't wonder you thought it was me. And now, my dear feudalist, it's another big day tomorrow. It's me for bed. Say goodnight to Ursie for me. I'll make myself a cup of tea in my own kitchen. And a snack. I'm just ravenous all the time I'm helping cook for shearers. It scares me."

"I'm ravenous too," he said, "but not for biscuits. And *I'm not scared.*" She was caught, held, kissed passionately.

He grinned unrepentantly. "One of the times when I *can't* slow the pace." He let her go, still laughing. She fled without a backward look, without another word.

Her last thought before she fell asleep was that Caleb Armstrong had at least decided one doubt she had had about herself. She wasn't frigid. Had just been unawakened. What a time to discover what that meant . . . with still another day of shearing to follow and a busy farm schedule ahead.

Chapter Ten

Shearing, of course, was succeeded almost immediately by the demonstration day given to the tourists from the Lodge, and the few days between meant extra special preparation for the catering. But Greta had no part in that. She was catching up on the lesson routine again. Sheep had been left unshorn for this, and all the men groaned as the day approached. "Time was," said Buck, "when we could heave sighs of relief when the gang departed but we hardly catch our breath now before we're at it again in front of an admiring crowd. Still I suppose it means we never lose the skill." All the men, young and old, had, at some time in their lives, worked on shearing gangs. They all shared in a sense of pride and the women enjoyed the extra money they earned.

Chester brought more than a score of people along but they were certainly an appreciative crowd, and cosmopolitan too. Caleb did the commentaries and did them extremely well, Greta thought, showing what he had renounced to come back to his father's valley. He had the true lecturer's touch, plus colour and warmth from his being (as he would've put it) a son of the soil.

There was a ring of pride as he sketched in the early beginnings, the rich mixture of nationalities when it was swarmed over with gold-miners from the four corners of the earth, men who had earlier experienced the rigours of the 'forty-nine gold rush in California, had gone on to Bendigo in Australia, then to here. Before that he had brought in the euphonious meanings of the Maori names for certain features. "Then," he said, "when the gold fever died down the valley became quiet again. Reminds me of Kipling, in his Recessional, saying: 'The shouting and the tumult dies, the

captains and the kings depart . . .' And perhaps this present era is the happiest of all, could even be happier yet." His eyes, glancing quickly from side to side till they found Greta, met hers with meaning. Hastily she looked down. Oh, you hound, Caleb Armstrong, that's not slowing the pace . . . he continued on, "One old miner never left here, in fact he lies among the graves on that hillside, among the sights and sounds he loved so long, one Isidore Kingdom. That's how it got its name. My grandfather, as a small child, had known and loved him, because Isidore's life spanned nearly a century.

"Gradually nature covered the scars where there had been diggings, tunnelling, the streams that had been damned for sluicing were freed again and tough but fruitful years followed . . . one after the other, with mating succeeded by birth, sowing by harvest. There is an everlastingness about farming whereas with gold there is only one harvest. Native bush regenerated, birdlife increased again."

The men seized an animal each, shearing began. Caleb came to where Greta was standing, She said, "Yes, you put it just as it is. Right this moment, watching those unprotesting animals, there's a centuries-old Biblical flavour to it: 'As a sheep before her shearers is dumb . . .'"

A man standing next to Caleb caught her words, said to him, "You ought to use her in this commentary too. You'd make a good pair." She saw the laughter lines creasing Caleb's cheeks and he shot her a sideways glance as if to say, "That's my aim, eventually, she's only got to say the word."

They put on exactly the sort of lunch they had served to the shearers, only much less in quantity. Greta had refused to sit with Caleb at the head of the longest trestle-table. "Of course not. I'll serve with Jane and Myrna," but she found herself included in the tour round the beautiful old garden and orchard after the children had shown the willing tourists an exhibition of their work in the schoolroom, with Kirsty and Rowena, as the two eldest pupils, who did very creditable commentaries. With a few unrehearsed additional remarks from the younger ones!

She knew a few anxious moments for Jason's sake when

two wives strayed from the orchard through the gap in the macrocarpa, and saw the fowlhouse. A voice floated back, "I say, just come and look at this: I never saw anything like it. The colour of the hen-house. It beats all!" The rest ducked through, gazed, were spellbound. Caleb got in quickly because Jason was right beside him. There wasn't a tremor in his voice. "We owe that to Jason here. Made a beautiful job of it as you can see. It was in a bad state till he took over. He maintains it inside too. Always clean hay in the nest-boxes. Our egg production has definitely gone up. It makes us think there may be something in colour therapy, even in the fowl-run. His next idea is to have a dividing fence there, in this run, so it can green over. Much like rotational grazing. Back to the old idea of one fallow field. We just run poultry for our own needs, but in time, if Jason stays on after his college days, we may go in for poultry on a commercial scale." Jason beamed. He hadn't escaped all teasing from painting it that colour.

Greta said to Caleb when Ben started displaying his enormous vegetable garden, "That was brilliant, Caleb, *and* kind."

He turned to her as they followed the crowd. "You're looking at me with warm eyes, Gretchen Mountford. I like it. Keep it up. Perhaps it's blotting out your sadder yesterdays. Nature healing the scars. Time it did. That fellow Martin wasn't worthy of you." She didn't need to answer for he quickened his pace to overtake the others. "That poplar there is over a hundred years old. It was planted by a miner in memory of a mate he lost in the Shotover floods in the eighteen-seventies. And that slightly smaller one, by Isie Kingdom to commemmorate the end of the Boer War."

Chester Burroughs said to Greta later, "Caleb's been in great form today. At first he hated to do this. But now he's sort of warmed to it. As if he's enjoying sharing all this with people from overseas or other parts of New Zealand."

Greta laughed, "Well, don't push your luck too far or too fast, Chester. Or increase the numbers, because the routine of this place is more than enough for him." She wanted to go on to warn him against any more pressure about publicity articles but Caleb appeared.

Chester plunged, but, fortunately, not about that. "Look, I know you prefer men to occupy your spare chalets and I can understand that, but I'm going to ask a favour. There was an article a chap who was here when you were away, did for me, for a brochure and he happened to mention this place. It seems that it greatly took the fancy of a woman planning a tour of N.Z. Not a young woman. I believe she's a topnotch novelist. She thought this had a romantic name."

Caleb groaned. "Here we go, she'll be thinking of it as a sort of mini-empire no doubt, with one of those masterful heroes no girl in her right mind would marry. One of these days I *will* change this name to Armstrong's Valley. And so . . . ?"

"Well, she's bringing a niece with her for company. She rang in the first place, right from London, though she's from Scotland, to see if I could arrange for her to have one of the chalets. I did say the owner didn't welcome publicity or long stayers, but she assured me it would never be mentioned by name or locality, just a fictional setting, but to observe the running of a sheep and deer station, would make her setting authentic. Sounds quite a homely sort of woman, not a slick journalist type at all. Must be because she mentioned she was bringing her niece to help her get over a bereavement. Probably a young widow. How about it?"

Caleb said, surprisingly, "What about it, Greta?"

To cover her surprise she asked quickly, "What's her name, Chester? I don't suppose I know her but I might know her books."

"She's a Lilian Shawley, but said she uses a *nom-de-plume* but I'd just got round to asking her what it was when the line from Milford Sound was wanted urgently. She was staying there."

Greta said, "Well, it's over to Caleb but it could be interesting. Hope I have read some of her books."

Caleb said, "If you'd like it, Greta, it'll be okay by me." He grinned, then said to Chester, "You'll think I'm mellowing on the subject but I'm just making this exception. I think it would be good for Greta to have someone from her part of the globe."

A strange tremor feathered Greta's wrists. Her part? Well, once it was her part. Chester grinned too, "I'll take the relenting of your policy for what ever reason you like. Okay, I'll be in touch when I get a definite date. She's going to ring from Lake Manapouri. You needn't make any special arrangements for them. She said they'd be quite content to just absorb the atmosphere. I daresay Greta might be able to spare them a bit of time, but it should make very little difference to either of you, or Ursie."

The following Saturday Caleb appeared at Greta's elbow as she was tying back a cascading exuberance of clematis in all its starry pink glory. He hadn't seen her that day till then. She kept very strictly to her rule of cooking her own breakfast and lunch. It was now after two o'clock. He said, "Can you spare half an hour or so? Ursie's gone across to Fairbairns' and she said I could show you this."

She tied an extra knot and descended the ladder, ignoring the hand he held out. "I know the *montana rubens* is just the common type of clematis but though I love all the other varieties, I do love this one best. They have fewer flowers and this one seems to brim over with the very joy of living."

He said, "Like you. I'm always conscious of that when I see you with the children, or the donkeys. It's working, isn't it, nature healing up the scars?"

Greta thought to herself: Not just nature. There was another alchemy at work and she was almost, but not quite, ready to admit it. He continued, "I want to show you this in Ursie's garden at this very moment when it's at its best. The seasons come early to her little secret walled garden, but they linger longer too. So at present summer is trying to jostle spring out. There are actually roses in bud on her arches, all named and precious."

She glanced at him as he opened the cedar-wood door into the garden. "You're a constant surprise to me. You sound lyrical."

His look down at her was disturbing in itself. "It's the effect you have on me. Must be because you're a newspaper

woman . . . and the best of the breed." They laughed and there was no irony in the remembrance now.

She said delightedly as the door swung back, "There's just something about a walled garden, isn't there? Must hark back to our childhood, when we read: *The Secret Garden.* At least *we* did, because Granny had it. Even some of the modern stories for children have secret gardens. Perhaps when I'm a retired governess, I could fall heir to this. Keep up the tradition."

"Not you. I've another role mapped out for you," There was no apology in his tone nor, for once, did she remind him he was supposed to be slowing the pace. He took her hand, led her along a path that ended in an old mossy garden statue, a fat cherub, looking up at the sky. He looked over the wall and pointed. "That was Mum and Dad's room. Where those french windows are. They aren't ranch sliders, you know. Much older than that. I've always wondered why they didn't build out a walled garden of their own. They were quite a romantic couple, you know. They could have walked there in twilights and early mornings, away from their three boisterous children. Just imagine apricots espaliered against our home-made bricks, and a little fountain in the middle making water-music. It's always dicey to grow apricots here, unprotected. We're so much nearer the mountains than at Roxburgh where they grow the best apricots in the world."

She didn't let him see how much the thought of those french windows opening on to a walled garden had disturbed her so she said, "Sheer parochialism. I suppose there are fruit-growing areas all over the world who would challenge you to that."

"You wait till I take you down there, and you stand under the trees of a friend of mine, eating perfectly sun-ripened fruit straight from the branches." She turned and asked what one of roses over an arch was called.

"I've no idea, but come on over here, it's what I brought you in for . . . our violets are over long since, but like I said the seasons linger here. This is nearly always sheltered and dewy, but the sun's right on them today, and it's brought out the perfume. It's almost overpowering."

That described it perfectly and because nothing is as evocative of memories, it overpowered Greta.

She couldn't speak. That garden at Melling Halt all those months ago, had had a brick wall too. A low one. Greta had leaned on it as that woman had shattered her dreams, had made it impossible to go on with all that had been planned. She had gone on picking violet after violet, all unknowing. Greta tried to swallow, to utter some word of praise as expected, but the poignancy and dreadfulness of that day rushed back over her, engulfed her.

She parted her lips but no sound came. Then as Caleb looked sharply at her, a mist rolled over her, a blessed oblivion, and she crumpled up at his feet.

She didn't know how long she was out to it. All she knew was that when she came round Caleb was swearing. Not at her, at himself! "You absolute fool, she's been working in the sun all morning and she's not used to it as you are – and it's bakingly hot in this enclosed space . . . Greta, come round, come round! I've got to get you out of here. But first, I must find out if you've hurt your head."

Her lashes flickered. It looked as if she tried to lift her lids but failed. She said weakly but gamely, "Stop blaming yourself. You couldn't know about—" she cut that off. Tried again, with a valiant attempt at lightening the situation, "I've always wanted to swoon like they did in the romantic days of old. But now that I have, I didn't know about it."

He said, much relieved, "I don't suppose any of those damsels did, either. Neither would they enjoy it or their escorts either. Theirs was mostly due to tight back-lacing, wasn't it? Wanting wasp-like waists. Dammed stupid anyway. Now . . . I'm going to carry you into Ursie's sitting-room. It opens on to here."

"You are *not* going to carry me," she said, endeavouring to sit up, but it was too much for her, she fell back against his arm.

He said, "You can't stop me." He was already kneeling on the lawn, slid a hand and arm under her shoulders, another under her knees. He stood up, strode to the steps, managed to grasp the low door-knob, pushed it open, and the next

moment she was on Ursie's comfortable old sofa, his left arm still round her. "You'll be better this way, not facing the sun."

She said weakly, "It has been very hot today and I probably did too much. I'll be fine in a moment. Think nothing of it. How truly stupid, in all the really sweltering places in the Middle East Dad was in, I never once fainted."

He looked down on her, his eyes searching hers. "I'm inclined to think it wasn't just the heat. You said it was something I couldn't know about. I'm beginning to have a faint suspicion I know the answer. Listen *liebling*, when Alastair died Mother put narcissi in his fingers. He'd always loved them. Dad would never have them brought inside again. He couldn't stand the perfume. Tell me, Greta, and tell me true. In that village that dreadful day, when that woman who inadvertently gave the show away about Martin, picked you flowers . . . were they violets? You said you thought she'd never be done. Violets take a long time to pick. Was that it?"

His eyes were still holding hers, she couldn't look away though she would have liked to. She couldn't even drop her lashes. Caleb was like that. A direct man who demanded truth.

"Yes, that was it. But please don't think it was because I haven't got over Martin yet. What I felt for him died an instant death when I found out about him and Virginia. But that sickening moment of realization rushed back on me, and all that followed . . . the identifying. Virginia had been killed instantly and was unmarked. Martin' wounds were – were more evident. But at least I saved his mother and Virginia's parents having to do it. But I still had to tell them, though the police helped me with that magnificently. But all that followed . . . the two funerals, the hollow pretence . . . assuming a greater appearance of grief than I really felt. Well, it brought it all back to me. The sun on the violets." She sat up, her voice strengthened. "Now, I'll just—"

"You'll do nothing," he said in a no-nonsense tone. She sank back. In wordless sympathy he laid his cheek against hers and because she felt he too needed sympathy for the

fright she had given him, and his deep remorse at having caused it, even if unwittingly, she brought the palm of her hand up against his other cheek. They just held each other like that for a few moments. Then he took her hand, pressed a kiss into the palm, folded her fingers over it, said rather unsteadily, "I'm reverting to the Victorian age too, but that's a tribute. For all you've come through this year and the way you've tackled another life. I'll bring you a drink here."

She shook her head. "No, I don't want Ursie coming in. I don't want to have to explain. Oh, she knows what happened to me in that Surrey village, but I'd like this to be just between you and me. I'll come into the kitchen and you can make me a cup of tea, Caleb. Brandy makes me cough. And thank you. You've put new life into me."

That night Greta changed into a light-weight woollen fabric frock in a beechy brown. These nights were still cool. She'd stood under the shower for ages, washing her hair and soaping her body most vigorously and then towelling it with the hard towels she preferred. She recognized it for an instinctive desire to rid herself of the grime from gardening and the associations of the incident. She didn't want to remember violets distilling their perfume under a sun too hot.

Yet there were other moments she wouldn't want to forget. Caleb's understanding, his touch, that wordless sympathy of cheek to cheek. His unexpected endearment that belonged to the speech of that first Gretchen. *Liebling* . . . darling! She hoped this happening wouldn't make him think how short a time it was since the tragedy. She wished, oh, how she wished it was years back in time. He might easily doubt her feelings for him when she had asked him to soft-pedal. Caleb deserved the best. He'd been disillustioned once. She wanted no doubts, no shadows, to fall upon this deepening relationship. For his sake, not hers.

He'd said to her when he had let her return to her own rooms, before Ursie came back, "I think we'll spend this evening in company with Ursie. Just one of our normal, family evenings. You've had a stressful afternoon. If we

don't have some company, we might be tempted to dwell on that shattering experience you had . . . and it might seem more important to you again. Am I being clumsy? But I've an instinctive feeling that what happened this afternoon ought to be relegated to the past. Not nurtured. I'm hoping that when you flew over the equator and came to the Southern Hemisphere, you crossed the threshold of an entirely new life. If I'm wrong, tell me."

She'd given him an unreserved look. "No, you are right. And one of our evenings with Ursie would be best for us both."

She found herself taking pleasure in dressing. The frock had a high neckline and over it she slid a long rope of yellow beads. It was very long, so she knotted it and gave it an affectionate pat. Dad had brought it back from Aden when he'd been on one of his trips when it wasn't wise to take women along. "I don't think there's any real value in them, Greta. Though the vendor called them Red Sea amber, but they'd suit your colouring. I bought them from one of the bum boats clustered below the ship we were using as headquarters."

He'd been right. Such a pure yellow. Above them her eyes sparkled. She needed no colour save her coral lipstick. She dabbed sandalwood scent on her wrists and below her ears. It seemed another link with the deserts she had known, the camel trains, Suez. Yet, despite that, she felt Greta of Armstrong's Valley again, not a devastated girl learning of betrayal in a Surrey garden.

She loved this living-room, the muted colours of the Indian carpets, the comfortable old furniture, the fireplace built of bricks made of the clay of this estate, and baked in their kiln, the gleam of the well-polished table. There was a vase of the first of the Iceland poppies on it, free, blessedly, of any perfume. Ursie was in her own special chair, knitting, and Caleb and Greta on the couch, happily wrangling over the cryptic crossword in one of last week's Otago Times.

Ursie put her knitting down. "The kids were telling me this afternoon about Caleb butting in on the lessons with an article on Buckler's Hard and Lord Nelson and said it was funny

when you discovered the article that had taken him down there was written by Greta. I thought it a nice coincidence, as if your life was meant to touch ours from the very start."

Greta said, "That's a kind thought, Ursie. Having you here, so kindred, made it for me. It could have been some old-fashioned disapproving ex-governess. If you do decide to take that overseas trip with your sister next year, you might like to pay that delectable spot a visit. I've some very good pictures of it in one of my albums. I'll fetch it."

She came back to find Ursie settling herself at the opposite end of the couch from Caleb. "You can sit between us. I guess he'd like to see the photos too, even if you've shown them to him before."

Caleb shook his head. "No, I've meant to ask had she any, to see how they compared with mine." It was very pleasant. Nothing awkward about this. She finally closed the album; a snap fell out. He picked it up. Taken somewhere in Spain or Portugal, he guessed. A girl rising up from the waves, laughing and carefree.

"Is this a cousin or some other relation, Greta? She's very like you, but with long hair. But for the fact the hair is dark, I'd swear it was you."

"Of course it's me. I'd just dived through a wave and faced the shore again and Dad snapped it. All hair looks darker when it's wet. I hated it long. I had to keep pushing it away. It was distracting."

"Then why did you let it grow?"

"Because—" she bit it off. Then she had to finish it somehow. "Because my mother wanted me to grow it." She didn't want to bring Martin into the conversation again, as preferring long hair on women. She shut her mind to the memory of Virginia's long coppery treeses curling softly on her shoulders. "So I can't stand that photo." She took it from Caleb, crossed to the fire, dropped it in. She made an odd gesture with her hands as if she were wiping them. When she turned she surprised an odd expression on Caleb's face. So odd that she instinctively said, "What is it?"

He answered very quickly, "Oh, nothing. Just reminded me of something."

She didn't know why but she felt the need of changing the subject, and said, "While I was in the schoolroom, I picked this up. Thought it was too good not to share with you two. All the children have written stories for me at some time, sometimes in the set work, sometimes just as an extra, choosing their own subjects. This was Arabella's. It gave me a lovely feeling, just wondering what might be in her future. She's only seven, yet already she's got a magic touch with words. Goes into day-dreams, and I'd love to know what's going on in that beautiful little head of hers. This is a gem, it got me from the first sentence which is what writing is all about. Listen . . . it's called *The Caterpillar's Story*. 'It's not much fun really, being a caterpillar. People squash you, birds eat you, knock you off the roses. But if they'd give me half a chance I'd turn into a great big flutter-winged butterfly. I'd be able to skim over the top of the trees far, far away, settle on a daisy, on the buddleia. I love the buddleias. I'd be able to climb into the middle of a hollyhock. Fancy having a hollyhock for a hammock!' That was as far as she'd got. I was entranced, could imagine that vision staying with her and coming back to her and delighting her when she's older. Perhaps a book for children, illustrated by herself. She's very good at drawing, which was my own worst subject at school. I longed to look into her future. There's great potential in most of these children."

"And you're the one to help them realise it," Caleb said, "all your geese are swans, bless you."

Greta said quickly, "Aren't you going to get your photos of Buckler's Hard and the rest of Hampshire? I know that area so well."

The three of them compared the photos, had their late supper, then Greta said, yawning, "Oh, dear, I must get off to bed."

Ursie said: "Off with both of you. We're going to the churches tomorrow, so it's an early start. I've rarely seen you looking so tired, Caleb. You big he-men are all the same. Don't know when you're whacked and will never admit to not feeling on top of the world."

Greta thought her faint had probably alarmed him more

than they'd guessed. Oh, well, tomorrow was another day and a more relaxing one.

It was. On alternate Sundays most of them went in for the morning services, the Rogers to the Methodists, the Fairbairns to St Faith's, the Catholic church not far above St Andrew's where Ursie, Greta and Caleb attended. Greta loved it, modern but built with a sturdy simplicity that suited the area, especially the plain wooden empty cross against a massive wall of embedded lake boulders. She made a practice of visiting the church lounge beneath for the sheer joy of the big landscape window that framed a perfect view of the incredibly blue waters of Lake Wakatipu, deep and cold, hardly varying in temperature winter or summer because its huge basin was fed with snow-water from the mountains reflected in it. Silhouetted against it was a cross of Iona, set in a polished green marble base, the gift of a minister from Los Angeles who had come here as a tourist and so loved it. Caleb touched the green with an appreciative finger. "I expect it reminded him of our greenstone, the New Zealand jade."

They went across to Ludwigtown to have lunch with Theresa and Murdoch and their family. Later, leaving Ursie happily esconced on a sun-lounger, chatting away, Caleb took Greta to the little white-washed stone church, surrounded with dark pines, with the hills of the gorge rising behind it. Theresa had wanted him to show Greta the memorials in it to long-dead Klausners. As they stood beneath one of them, he said, "So that you get the true feeling of your roots being here. So you know you belong."

She said slowly, "I do have that feeling when I see these."

Then they came to the one to Theresa's grandfather, Emil Klausner. "I feel I can identify with this," she said, "even though it's a more distant branch of the family. In Salzburg I heard so much of them, though most of all of Trudi, who was, I know, Emil's second wife, so Theresa's step-grandmama."

"Yes, not related to her by blood, but loved and remembered most of all. Never had a child of her own, except

those of her spirit, which means half of Ludwigtown. Knew great sorrow because as a young bride she lost her twenty-two-year-old husband in the First World War but when Emil, a widower, visited the home of his ancestors, he brought her back here. See what it says. It's a wonderful tribute. 'To Trudi, the well-beloved.' " He hesitated then said, "This is the place for roots, isn't it, Gretchen?"

She said, "Yes. It is. It is so strange that our branch of the family dwindled away to practically nothing. Of course Mother was an only child, her parents were married late in life, and they moved north when she was so young. How strange that, I, who lived such a roving life, should be the one to return to this part of the world."

"Not strange to me," he said. "To me it smacks more of the inevitable. Oh, it's all right, Greta, I shouldn't dream of quickening the pace today. It's too soon after yesterday. When you come to me, as I believe you must come, I want it to be uncluttered with that disillusioning past."

Contrarily then she wanted to turn to him within these hallowed walls and say: "It's all over now, Caleb, those links with the past. The ones with Martin and Virginia . . . they don't matter any more," but seeing *he* had now made a condition, she had better go along with it. Perverse? Yes, but then most humans were.

Chester Burroughs rang up to say Lilian Shawley and her niece would come to the valley on Thursday. "We've got a big day or two on then. I hope to be miles away in the foothills with a party, camping out. Normally as you know, I bring guests over or get one of the staff to do so, but I'm impressed with this woman's driving ability. Some of the roads she's been on here and in Canada are testimony to that. Quite apart from that, I'm impressed with her personality. You'll enjoy her. And the niece is quite a looker. She'll bring most of what they'll need with them, of course, the kitchen staff will see to that. It will suit her better than here. She wants solitude to copy out her rough notes about Lakes Te Anau and Manapouri, for instance. She says she'll just arrive, then come across to meet you, or Ursie if you're not around."

It turned out that Greta had just dismissed school when Caleb appeared. He had a large wicker trug with him. "We always send some of Ben's vegetables across when we get people occupying the chalets. We feel it makes a welcoming gesture to cover up the fact that we really wish them to Jericho, though I don't think we've ever given that away. In the main though they just look on us doing this as a minor side-line to our income and don't know it was a plaguey condition for making it possible to have access to the Lake Road."

She looked at the trug . . . a dozen brown eggs, stalks of cherry-red rhubarb, a fresh lettuce, palely green, well-hearted, a few stalks of early asparagus, sugar-snap peas, last year's potatoes, home-made salad-dressing, Braeburn apples fresh from the cool store. He said, "Ursie's across at Myrna's but she's left a batch of pikelets cooling on the grid, and a cold cooked chicken in the fridge; she thought you might like to go over with me, taking them. She's so glad for you that someone in your own line, an author, is coming."

"How sweet of Ursie. She's said once that one never has to feel banished to the back of beyond when all the world comes to the beauty spot of Queenstown."

"Well, I, too, think this could be very interesting."

How interesting they were yet to find out.

The chalets were on the side of the hill among the trees. The larches were just leafing in their young pale green. The ones belonging to the men bore evidences of occupation, farm boots, scrapers, shepherds' crooks, buckets, but the two that Chester needed to use occasionally were a little apart and Ursie, with a little help from Ben, was glad to keep them weed-free in their miniature gardens.

"How ideal for a writer," said Greta appreciatively. "You never know, she might want to stay on for a while. A novelist, after all, can please herself how long she stays away from her home pad. Don't be surprised if she approaches you about that. Such an ideal spot."

"Heaven forbid," said Caleb. "I'd like us to have the

valley to ourselves. Perhaps I'm as much of a recluse as old Isidore was."

"Hardly, you share all the bounty of this estate with two other families and make sure the single men come over any night they ask, for Chess or Scrabble or cards. To say nothing of inviting their girl-friends over on many Saturdays."

He chuckled. "Did you ever imagine you'd find something to admire in me that first day at Ludwigtown?"

"That's well in the past, Caleb, superseded by the *real* you. You were so understanding about the violets."

He turned to look at her. "With you in a mood like this, I think it's a pity we've got to play hosts for a few days. But for that, I'd have taken you to the Hill of Infinity. Because I've got something I must tell you. Something I wasn't sure of till now. I always feel near Alastair there, and very few of the others go there." No more could be said, they'd reached the open garden patch that was bordered with cottage flowers, easily grown ones, alyssum, daisies, forget-me-knots, petunias and pansies, even a few fading violets . . . violets that didn't give Greta the slightest pang today. As she'd said, that was all in the past.

Lilian Shawley must've seen them coming, for she opened the door before they could knock. About Ursie's age, in casual clothes and with an ease of manner that was very pleasing, Greta felt a stir of happy anticipation. Another woman from the British writing world she knew so well. Her grey eyes were as clear as Caleb's. The sort of woman you would instinctively trust. She said, "Oh, come on in. What a lovely welcome, the sort of thing I've missed in this hotel life we've lived so long. What lovely vegetables. And someone had put a bowl of lilac on the centre table. I simply loved that."

Greta said, "Ursie Niven's work. Caleb's housekeeper and friend, once his governess. It's out of her little walled garden. She'll meet you later. She sent you these fresh pikelets." She lifted a corner of the snowy napkin.

Lilian peeped. "Oh, my favourites. Only in Scotland we call them Scotch pancakes."

Caleb held out his free hand and his voice held real

welcome. "We hope you'll have a very happy time here and find all you want."

Greta hid a smile. The door, of course, as it was a chalet, opened straight into the big living-room with a polished cork floor scattered with fleeces in their natural colours. A stairway ran up each side to the bedrooms, and a door at the far end in a wall of light wood, that led to the kitchen. Paintings of local scenes by resident artists hung against the polished *rimu* panelling and the sun streamed in.

"My niece will be through in a moment," said the author.

Caleb made no bones about asking her if she wrote under another name. "Because we don't know you under Lilian Shawley. We do hope we've read you under something else."

Lilian Shawley chuckled. "I don't expect everyone to have read my books, or even to like them if they had, so don't feel at all embarrassed if you've never heard of me. I didn't marry till I was forty and had written several mystery-romances by then, so my publisher, naturally, wanted me to retain it. I'm Lilian Moore. But—"

Caleb broke in, turning to Greta, "Was that the one you gave me to read from your own store? The one about the Gulf of St Lawrence? It brought in the early days there that reminded me of our own pioneer history, though of course Canada's was earlier. But I took no notice of the author's name."

Greta sighed, "Not the most tactful utterance to greet the author whose brain-child it was. It wouldn't please her publisher either. Bad sales technique."

He grinned. "Sorry, Lilian Moore. Just put me down as a horny-handed son of the soil. But I promise you I shall never forget it again."

Lilian chuckled. "I like it. Sometimes it puts a strain on people when they're introduced and don't know me from Adam. Except, of course, that I'm wearing more clothes. At least you've read one."

She turned her head. "Ah, I think I hear my niece coming. I can't think what's been keeping her. I'm so lucky to have her with me. I've never had it so good."

The door opened and a tall, elegant girl strolled into the room. It was quite an entrance. She had loose, coppery hair flowing about her shoulders, brows of exactly the same colour and eyes that easily rivalled the blue of Lake Wakatipu itself. She came down the long room and said, "Oh, hullo Greta. I'm not surprised to see you even if you must be surprised to see me. I planned this. Saw to it that when my gifted aunt asked me to accompany her, that she heard about this delectable spot."

There was insolence in every word. Greta stared at her, unable at first to speak, then she managed: "Jessica!" and told herself everything would be all right. *Caleb was here.* He would see her through. The last time she had seen Jessica was at Virginia's funeral. She must say something more. But what? She must put Caleb in the picture. She turned to look at him and the words she was trying to utter were stilled on her lips.

He was staring at Jessica as if he couldn't believe his eyes. Almost as if he'd met her before. But how could he have? Greta felt as if the solid ground had been cut from under her.

Chapter Eleven

Lilian Shawley's voice cut into that dreadful silence. "Jessica, what are you talking about? You said nothing of this to me. What does it mean? You must have some reason and it had better be a good one. You've never been secretive. More inclined to be blunt. And believe me, *now* is the time for bluntness, so you had better explain. You've brought me here under false pretences! This, it seems to me, is abusing people's hospitality. I don't like it; what *can* have come over you? No wonder your mother was so relieved when you were willing to come here with me. She said you'd never been the same since Virginia's death. But that's no excuse for behaving like this."

Caleb said, in a winded sort of way, "That's it then. Virginia's sister. But why on earth—"

The scornful voice went on, "Oh, you know about Virginia, do you? Well, that means I don't have to put you in the picture. I thought Greta might have conveniently forgotten all about Virginia. Come out here to start a new life. I'd have thought she'd have wanted to forget all about what she caused back in Surrey. I heard she was just a governess here."

Caleb seemed to have controlled his voice properly. "She won't be *just* a governess for much longer. In fact she's not just a governess now, she's the hub of our existence. Everyone's the happier for having her here. *You are going to sit down at this table, Jessica-who-ever-you-are, and explain it to us.* You owe it to your aunt as well as to us. And I'm sure Greta needs to sit down. What ever bee you've got in your bonnet this is going to be thoroughly thrashed out." He swung round, pulled out a chair, and said, "Greta, *you* must need this."

To his immense surprise Greta looked entirely unmoved. Surely she couldn't be! She said, "It's all right, Caleb, I'm not repeating my swoon of the other day. This isn't the time for swooning. It's got to be a misunderstanding. But for Jessica's sake perhaps we should all sit." Her gesture was almost imperious. They all sat. Her voice was quite calm. "Caleb, this isn't just Virginia's sister, it's her *twin*. Her identical twin."

Unexpectedly Caleb said, "Yes, I know."

Mystified, she blinked. "You know? How *could* you know?"

"She'd have to be her identical twin," he said.

"How?" she asked.

"Never mind, but I do. I knew only so very recently. Not about the sister, but who Virginia was. I didn't want to give you another shock, so soon after you fainted. I knew that night. But that can be explained later." He made a gesture that had as much authority as Greta's had, a moment ago. He said, "We'll begin at the beginning, Jessica, and you are going to tell us exactly why you came here, breathing fire and vengeance by the look of you, so I'm sorry for your aunt, pitchforked into a situation like this. What have you got against Greta? Surely it was your sister who harmed *her*?"

Jessica was quite calm, very deliberate. "Yes . . . here goes. I can't excuse Virginia's behaviour but she didn't deserve to lose her life over it . . . with a vengeful woman hot on their tracks, finally causing the accident that killed them both."

Caleb thumped his fist on the table. "You must be mad! It wasn't like that at all. How dare you come here and make such a monstrous allegation. She wasn't—"

"Let me handle this, Caleb, please." Greta looked so normal, neither deathly white nor flushed with outrage. She said quietly, "Nothing is to be gained by us shouting at each other in the heat of the moment, Jessica and I. I've seen this sort of thing happen so often in my father's work, only in much graver situations . . . This concerns only us, four people. I couldn't possibly be blamed for those deaths.

So let's get to the bottom of what could possibly have led you to believe that."

At that precise moment Caleb became aware of how much a part of her father's life Greta had been. This wasn't the dedicated teacher of the estate children, the laughing girl romping with them in the donkey paddock, the lovely girl in a golden gown he had danced with, sung with . . . the girl who could always be depended upon to see the funny side of things, though he doubted if there was a sunny side to this. This was the girl who had sat in on tense meetings on her father's missions abroad, calmly taking down notes, the one who had seen some turbulent problems that never got reported in newspapers, smoothed out.

She said now, leaning her elbows on the table and looking straight at Jessica, "There's been enough grief and anguish without you and me adding another mite to it. Only I can't have you making an accusation like that without going to the bottom of it. But don't get distressed about it. That won't be easy for you but take your time and tell me what you heard that could make you think – but leave that. I must keep my cool too. Jessica, I know how close you and Virginia were. I believe most twins are. You've had it harder than I have. Oh, yes, I lost Martin too, but you see I had already lost him when I found out he had been weekending with Virginia. I was going to release him as soon as I could see him alone. He would have been quite free to marry Virginia if that was what he – what they both wanted. But I never got the chance. Now please, tell me how you thought I had in any way contributed to their accident."

Jessica's voice hadn't quite the same ring of confidence now, though it still had a venomous undertone as if she didn't want to part with what she felt to be justified anger. "I'll tell you and if you can explain it away, you're more devious than I'd ever have credited."

Greta said, "It's a mystery to me. I always liked you and Virginia. I thought you were fun, especially the way you used to change clothes and play pranks on us. Now, go on."

Jessica said, "I hadn't connected it at first, I was too crushed by my sister's tragic death. I thought nothing of

Virginia being with Martin. After all, I didn't work for that paper. I thought he'd probably have just given her a lift. I remember once they were both sent off together when he had to go to one of the branch offices and she had to report on that re-enactment near Farnham. I was away that weekend visiting my aunt in Scotland. Later I did hear a bit of whispering about them being together, but thought that just a bit of gossiping conjecture. Then about three months afterwards I got a ring from the man who owned that cottage near Melling Halt. I didn't even know about it till then."

Caleb interjected: "Melling Halt! Yes, that *was* quite near." As they all turned to him, he said hurriedly, "It doesn't matter. That can be explained later."

They gazed uncomprehendingly, then accepted that. Jessica went on. "This man was a little diffident. After I told him I was the late Virginia Lessington's sister, he carried on, said, 'I'm glad it wasn't her mother,' then told me he'd discovered a small wallet, a lady's one, in one of the cupboards at the cottage, with my sister's address in it. The accident got a lot of publicity of course and Virginia's name in it, had puzzled him a bit. Martin had said he wanted to spend a weekend there, and the man admitted he thought Martin was taking you there, anticipating the wedding. Then when the purse turned up, it put him in a quandary. He wouldn't have returned it had there not been quite a sum of money in it, and he didn't want to be dishonest. I took it as calmly as I could and he asked me to meet him at Melling Halt and he'd give it to me and that would tidy up the whole incident. Then he got called to Portugal on business, so he rang my office and said he would leave it with the woman next door, but because there was money in it, also he wanted no gossip, he'd parcel it up. He did it quite well, put it in a shoebox and then wrapped it in brown paper. Sort of thing anyone could forget."

She paused. "It was all very disturbing. I hadn't come to terms with Virginia's death then, and I felt I must keep it from my parents. They had had a bad time over it, naturally. I went down and she was quite a kindly woman. She got a shock when I appeared on her doorstep, as I was so like

Virginia. She asked me in, gave me a cup of tea. When she had read about the accident she'd realized this was the couple who'd been at the cottage. She had taken them for a married couple, said they'd been there before, and sounded a little shocked, but not unduly so. See, I freely admit you had every right to be furious. But she went on to say that strangely enough that afternoon a girl had looked over the wall and asked had she the key, that she and her fiancé were going to spend their honeymoon there. That she had said what a pity she hadn't come sooner, that there'd been another couple there. She added that no couple had come to honeymoon there however, that perhaps knowing that couple had been killed, she felt superstitious about it. I said, 'I wonder how she'd have known it was them,' and she said, 'Well, I mentioned the names, Martin and Virginia. So she would be bound to connect it. I even mentioned a red M.G.' I immediately realized you must've been trailing them. I suppose they got a glimpse of you and didn't want a confrontation. Oh, I can't excuse Virginia, or Martin . . . but to come to that! He'd recognize your car if he saw it in his rear mirror. Perhaps he thought he could deny it, if they got away. He'd speed up. So when I met your brother and he told me that you were living in one of the most beautiful spots on earth, and my aunt was coming to this very area, I made up my mind I'd let you know you weren't without blame! You got off scot-free."

Greta *had* lost some of her colour by now, and there was the faintest tremor in her voice but she said, "Oh, Jessica, this has all been needless anguish for you. Better by far if that honest man hadn't returned the money. That woman told me they'd left half an hour or more earlier when she said it was a pity I'd missed them. I wasn't on their trail. The feature editor sent me off to write up the interior of Roxby Hall. A bit out of my league but he got let down by someone else. Saw a signpost to Melling Halt and thought I'd take a look. Yes, I did get a shock, felt betrayed. More by Martin than Virginia. I knew instantly there'd be no wedding, that I'd never risk an unfaithful husband. I just hoped Martin would be at his flat that night but I was going to get him to take me

out somewhere where we could be sure of no interruptions. I wasn't going to say anything to Virginia . . . at least I hoped I could resist that temptation.

"I drove on a bit blindly because I couldn't see for tears, felt it was a bit risky, driving like that, and sat for quite a time, in fact, long enough to come to the conclusion that I wasn't really heart-broken and that if I was honest with myself it wasn't one of the great romances of all time, that I was more carried away with the idea of a settled home at last. Then I went on and got caught in a horrific thunderstorm. The passenger-side wiper jammed and the other wouldn't work without it, so I had to get out to free it, and got really soaked. It took time. Jessica, you've got to believe me. There's a network of roads there. I'd no way of knowing which they'd take till they reached a motorway, then I turned a bend and was waved down by a man who'd been pressed into service to divert the traffic. He said there was a huge pile-up of cars from there on, and that there'd been two minor prangs already. He was turning everyone now, back on their tracks. When he said there'd been a double fatality, a man and girl in a red MG, I knew immediately, though I hoped desperately it wouldn't be them. This wretched man tried to stop me. Couldn't blame him for that of course. More and more cars were arriving so there was no time to gasp out my fears . . . He ordered me to the other side of the road. I yelled at him to move it himself, that I was a newspaper woman. And – I can't prove it was so long after they had left the cottage – except that it had taken so long to get – to get Martin out." She stopped as the sheer wretchedness of the hours that followed rushed over her, and another voice took up the tale.

"But *I* can prove it," the voice said. "She got out of the car, said: 'Move it yourself: The keys are in the ignition,' and ran past the two next cars and jumped into a ditch on the verge . . . and I swore and couldn't do a thing to stop her because more cars were coming and I had to stop them, turn them."

Attention was diverted from Greta and Jessica immediately. They all stared at Caleb. Then Greta said: "Oh no! It *couldn't* have been you. It couldn't. Things don't happen like that."

There might have been nobody else in the room save Greta and Caleb. He said, "Don't they? You're a newspaperwoman . . . you know darned well incredible coincidences are always being reported. They almost inevitably bear the headline 'Stranger Than Fiction'. Besides, when you get your breath back, you'll know full well that that was exactly what happened. . . . Yes, I can see you do. Now, steady on, Greta, don't you remember that twice I've had a tantalizing half-recollection when you've said just that: 'The keys are in the ignition.' Once behind the Rectory, again when the donkeys arrived from Glenorchy. But it wasn't till the night after you fainted because the smell of violets in Ursie's walled garden had been too evocative of that moment when that woman at Melling Halt kept picking them for you, when she had just brought your world crashing around your ears, all unknowingly, that I became almost certain that it must've been you because I remembered the violets on the seat of the car when eventually I had time to turn it round. A later driver stopped the traffic further back so I got the chance. When I realized it, I got quite a jolt. Like missing a step in the dark, then saving yourself by clutching at the banister. I hadn't time to think it out then, I was too concerned trying to bring you round. I dared not question you. But that night, when Ursie asked you for your photos of Buckler's Hard, that snap of you fell out, with long hair, so wet it looked dark, coming up out of the sea in Spain, I knew."

He turned directly to Jessica and Lilian. "You see the distraught driver of that car had long hair, plastered to her like witch-locks so wet it looked dark and of course the light was poor due to that terrific thunderstorm. Now you *must* believe me, Jessica. I'd already been at the scene over half an hour. I hadn't seen it happen, others had. They were waiting for police and ambulances to arrive and I could best help by going on and turning back some of the traffic. It took even longer to get the cutting-gear there to get them out. Sorry, Jessica, but for Greta's sake I've got to. Actually it happened in brilliant sunshine, then the deluge. That's why I got such a shock at seeing you today. I'd seen this beautiful girl, your mirror-image, quite unmarked, except that her life

had gone. I wasn't needed as a witness. I'd arrived later. I got back to London very late, went down to Dover and crossed to Ostend on a very early boat next day. I never saw a paper." His mouth gave a wry twist. "I was too disgusted with a woman who wouldn't even move her car before she got the ghoulish details of a tragedy. How did you recover your car, Greta?"

She said in a level tone that betrayed nothing of how she was shrinking inwardly, remembering what had followed, "When they finally got Martin out, I went with them to – the mortuary. I identified them. My only thought, then, was that at least it saved their families having to do that. The police were marvellous, as they always are, in my experience, and one of them with a policewoman, took me back. I hoped the car hadn't been stolen meantime, though that of course, was nothing to—" and suddenly she couldn't finish. She swallowed, and said, "I tossed the violets over a hedge. The policewoman drove my car back, we followed the police car. They helped me tell Martin's mother and your mother and father." She stopped, felt as if she'd missed something out, recalled it. "Coping with the condolences was the worst for me. It was so traumatic, Mother and Father hit on the idea of sending me out to distant relations in Ludwigtown. I'd met them long ago in Salzburg. Ludwigtown is my mother's birthplace. She thought the Gunns might get me a teaching position which was what I had trained for originally. Caleb didn't get home for three weeks after that and due to the circumstances of our first meeting, about three minutes flat, we didn't recognize each other. I still didn't know till right now. Though Caleb did tell me very recently he had something to tell me when we could find time for it. In any case, when we met at the Rectory he was too furious with my cousins for engaging a newspaper woman from London for a job in the back of beyond, he blew his top, all unknowing I was within earshot, so I confronted him and told him exactly what I thought. It took us some time to become friends. But, Jessica, I can only guess how much you must have suffered." She looked across at Jessica whose beautiful features seemed as if carved in alabaster. "Please believe me."

Jessica's tears spilled over. "Of course I believe you. Greta, will you forgive me? This must have given you a ghastly shock today, not only bringing it all back but being accused of causing their death. We all knew what Martin was for speeding. We said so at the time. I expect he simply failed to take the bend." She looked across at her aunt. "I'm sorry, Aunt Lilian. I'm afraid I used you for my own ends and treated you to an abominable scene. We'll have to go. I don't know what excuse we can make to Mr Burroughs but if we can just stay the one night, we'll think of something and be gone tomorrow."

Greta expected Caleb to agree, thankfully, but another surprise awaited her. He said, "This has been a revelation to me. For the first time I've realized fully how many peace pow-wows Greta has sat through with her father. If I'd have been accused of that, I'd have lost my cool. I think the best way of erasing this permanently for the two of you, would be for you to stay on for the length of time agreed upon. How about that, Mrs Shawley? Do you think you could manage it? I'd like that tragedy overlaid for both of these girls." They all stood up. Jessica moved swiftly, came round the table, put her head down on Greta's shoulder, the tears spilling over.

The other two looked at each other, and without a word spoken, moved out into the beauty and sunshine outside.

It would have been hard to imagine a more awkward moment for two people newly met. The scene below Caleb Armstrong and Lilian Shawley was in complete contrast to their feelings. Sheer pastoral simplicity near them, hillsides sweet with trees, dipping down to paddocks of springtime emerald, prosperous-looking farm buildings, a charming old farmhouse more than a century old, surrounded by an orchard foaming with blossom and a garden where generation after generation had planted the flowers that belonged to their old world and to their new. Through the floor of the valley wound a miniature river whose source was back in classical mountains anything but miniature. There were two other houses with modern sparkling windows, lines of washing fluttering in the breeze, sounds of children

playing, a glimpse of swings and roundabouts to add more domesticity, birdsong and a blue cloudless sky.

They stood there unable to do anything but take it in, then Caleb said, "Where do we go from here?" Then he added, "I mean when those two devastated girls emerge. How do we bridge the gap?"

Lilian said, "We must do it somehow, for their sakes, then I'll take my niece out of that girl's life. I've an idea you are just the one to pick up the pieces for her. What a futile word sorry is. But I can't think of another."

Caleb gave one of his swift smiles that transformed the rugged but handsome face. "I think we must do better than that, for *both* girls. I would have given anything to have spared Greta that, but it wasn't possible. To see a mirror-image of someone who—" He stared down at his feet. He mustn't finish that. "*I* found it enough of a shock but – for her—" He started again. "I think your niece had been suffering from delayed shock, suffered it for months, misunderstanding the situation and then it became an obsession. I lost a brother." He waved to the far hillside of the valley where, among the pines, could be seen, faintly, the white tombstones. "He lies there, yet sometimes even yet, I can't believe he's gone. His death, though we did resent his life being cut short, was the outcome of illness, not tragedy. But Virginia was Jessica's twin and I'd say it was a double loss to find out she'd played someone in their own circle false. Got her off-balance, possibly just as the grief was beginning to heal, when that man rang her about the purse. That woman, who, earlier, had unwittingly dealt Greta a blow, dealt Jessica another. There was a moment back there when I couldn't have thought like this. The next one I couldn't believe Greta's reaction.

"I knew she'd had an adventurous life, but all in that second I became aware of the many tense situations she'd sat through. All her life she must've been influenced by what can be done behind the scenes, with reconciliations and understanding. I'm inclined to think that if you and your niece go away too soon, it will somehow lay waste that attitude. I admire your girl too. She took the explanation,

didn't try to justify herself. Tell me, Lilian, do you think it would be possible for us to keep it between the four of us? Give the pair of you four or five days here? I don't want to have to tell my housekeeper or any of the men or their wives. What do you say?"

The aunt raised bewildered eyes to his. "I'm rarely at a loss for words. Authors seldom are. But there doesn't seem any adequate ones. Except that my admiration isn't only for Greta. An offer like that is like . . . like giving a wounded enemy water. And food and shelter. But it will have to be decided by the two main characters in this – this drama. We'll have to wait for them to come out. They need this time alone. I'm willing, if they can take it. And Caleb, I want you to be sure of something. That this situation will never be used by me in a book." She grinned. "Besides, I've more than enough imagination as it is."

He grinned back. "Thank you. I hadn't thought of it, but it just could've occurred to me later. May I say how glad I am that someone like you was with Jessica. Do you feel like walking round the garden? This chalet has a bigger one than the others. There's one vacant just now, and the other three are what the single shepherds occupy. They get their meals at the cookhouse. Old Ben, once the station cook, feeds them. As an author you'll enjoy Ben. Salt of the earth. Well-read too, just as some of the old miners were. His room over there is full of books, read and re-read. Have you seen Glenorchy yet? At the Head of the Lake. Spell as one word, not two, unlike your Scots Glen Orchy. I don't know why. It's less than half a century since the only access was by water. There was a tiny library there, rich with the history of last century, even to early editions of the *Cornhill Magazine*. I believe they're in Dunedin library now.

"There is a magnificent mountain up there, Mount Earnslaw. Same name as our Lady of the Lake, launched 1912, The S.S. *Earnslaw*, a large twin-screw steamer. All gleaming white paint and polished brass. Can take over a thousand passengers. What a background that would make for one of your books. There's a Paradise up there, and Paradise House, set in great native beeches that were saplings

when the Magna Carta was signed. And a huge wooden guest-house, Arcadia, where in the early days, we used to send our Governors-General to get away from it all. The sort of recuperative isolation hard to find these days. There's a lot of personal history here too, things that are historical, not too personal. Plenty of papers at the house about that. Could be worked into a fictional setting quite well."

Lilian Shawley recognized his conversation for what it was, an olive branch. As he went on, tension lessened, normality began to take over. "Have a look over here. Just past the aspens are the remains of a sort of quarry where, long ago, some of the bricks surrounding our gardens were made. The clay there was ideal. They were mainly just sun-dried. Though later a kiln was used. My mother and Ursie got the men to fill it in a bit in terraces, and made a sunken garden which is the pride of their hearts. They even kidded my father to devise drainage so it's not a danger to the toddlers in the families." He was gradually getting her away from the path so that when the other two emerged it wouldn't be awkward for them, facing two pairs of anxious eyes.

The little paths, ochre-coloured, with a scattering of gravel to give better foothold, ran everywhere and were edged with catmint, and ice-plant; rosemary in blue cascades hung down scenting the air. Broom and veronica flourished and some kind of ground creeper kept the weeds down.

They heard a door open above them, and glanced up, unseen by the girls. Jessica's voice floated down to them. "Poor darlings, I wonder where they've gone. Lilian is such a duck of an aunt. I don't know how I could have inflicted such a scene upon her. How on earth am I going to be able to convince her it's all over? That it was a wrong surmise that I fostered because I was raw from losing my twin, and to find she was guilty of going off with another girl's fiancé, made me look for a scapegoat. I wish—"

The voice trailed off and they thought Greta might have laid a restraining hand on her arm. Greta's voice said, "You've just said it's over and done with, let's prove it.

Don't for goodness sake start another complex, a guilty one. I suffered from that too because I couldn't rid myself of feeling Martin would never have gone off the rails if he had been certain enough that I loved him as one should love the man you're going to marry. I'd lived such an ever-changing lifestyle I was really in love with stability so in a sense I cheated on him. My parents were worried too, thought a change of scene might help. And it sure did. The Gunns knew Caleb's kingdom needed a governess, so engaged me, while Caleb was on this award scheme so I didn't meet him till he arrived back. What am I talking about? I had, but didn't know it. Boy, am I glad he didn't know I was the ghoulish reporter I'd claimed to be. How could I ever have guessed that the man who turned me back, or tried to, would be the one to rid me of that guilt feeling. He has no time for it. From that day on I began my life again. So, what ever happens, Jessica, you mustn't feel guilty about coming here and confronting me. It was only based on a misconception. Now we have got to find Lilian and Caleb and somehow convince them we've ironed everything out."

Caleb called up, "You won't need to try. We heard the lot and *are* convinced. Come on down, Greta, and show Jessica the quarry garden. By now, Jessica, your aunt has practically decided to whisk this quarry off, mentally, to some other delectable spot in New Zealand and weave one of her mysteries about it. I'm hoping she'll single out more of our station features in the next few days, to thicken her plot and give us a personal stake in that book-to-be. You can stay on as long as you like."

The two figures on the terrace seemed incapable of speech. Caleb said, not lowering his voice, to Lilian, "That's scuttled them. What a blessing we overheard. Saves a lot of explanations. But come on down, I've been telling Lilian about the donkeys, and she's dying to see them."

As in a dream the girls descended, reached the others and then looked uncertain and finally burst into very natural-sounding laughter. Greta said, sobering up, "Caleb, my father would approve of you greatly. You've smoothed over

an awkward moment very naturally. Yet when you first came home I thought you a very blunt man."

He cocked an eyebrow at her. "That isn't worthy of you. No one would ever dream you moved in diplomatic circles. Right . . . I feel the line to take with Ursie is: 'What do you think? One of our chalet guests has turned out to be someone Greta knew in London, and her aunt is no less than Lilian Moore whose books you love.'"

Greta, much relieved, said, "I can hear the children in the donkey paddock, then I'll show you my quarters. Like an apartment. I'll make you a meal. I've got Cornish pasties in my deep-freeze – they'd soon thaw out in the microwave, and we'll have a salad with them. If you disappear back into the chalet you'll make me feel frustrated. I want Jessica to give me news of all the rest of the set we got round with."

Lilian, perhaps afraid her niece would refuse, agreed hastily, but in the end Ursie skittled that idea; her delight was so great when she knew who Lilian was, she flung up her hands in horror at the idea of a snack for her favourite author. "My guardian angel must've been working overtime. I was inspired to put in a very large leg of lamb with vegetables round it. We've plenty of mint sauce and red currant jelly, which ever you prefer with it. Girls, you can peel some of our Granny Smiths, for an apple pie."

Jessica started to laugh and it had a very natural sound. "I can foresee you'll meet up with this meal in a future book. My aunt is the only who-dunnit-writer who works luscious meals into the mystery. She's a wizard at somehow advancing the plot at the dinner-table."

"I know," said Ursie happily.

Jessica said, "And when we've done our peeling, Greta can give me a jotter and I'll put down exactly what is roasting round the meat."

"Potatoes, *kumeras*, that's the native sweet potato, pumpkin. And we'll have our own peas. We freeze vast quantities. Ben is a great provider. But except for the *kumera* I expect it's much what you'd get in Scotland?" Ursie knew all the books, not just the Canadian ones and must've absorbed any

biographical details on the covers. She added, "Oh, I think someone told me pumpkin isn't highly thought of in Britain. They eat more marrow."

"True enough. It's mainly at Hallowe'en they appear in the shops, but we use pumpkin a lot in Canada where I spent the happiest fifteen years of my life. And pumpkin and bacon soup is a favourite of mine."

It turned out an hilarious evening. Ben was invited over for coffee, as Ursie knew how he'd enjoyed the last Lilian Moore she'd bought in Queenstown, and he and Lilian took to each other at once. Later the three single men arrived. Garth said, with a cheerful effrontery, "I know we've got a nerve but we couldn't pass this up, in case you're not here for long. I've a cousin in Scotland, Mrs Moore, I mean Mrs Shawley, who told me in a letter recently that the yarn you wrote about the North Sea oil situation is to be made into a TV film. He'll get a shock when he hears we've been entertaining you. I brought my camera across. How about it? I'm sure he thinks nothing ever happens down here. I reckon you ought to go up to see our deer. Do you ride? If not we'd take the jeep. Pity you couldn't come back in November when we do the deer-velveting."

Lilian laughed. "We'll be up in the Bay of Islands by then, I want to take notes of the big-game fishing, and see the island Zane Grey used as a base when he fished there. But I'll take notes, and perhaps Caleb has videos of that too. He's promised to show me all other aspects of farming."

It was late when Greta and Caleb walked the guests back to the chalet. The men had offered to do that, but Caleb sent them over ahead of them, to switch the electric blankets on. It was still cool at night. They might have been four friends of long standing.

Coming back Greta instinctively turned towards the picket gate that led towards the main house but Caleb turned to the right, cutting short her protest by saying, "Haven't you forgotten that the longest way round is the sweetest way home? We've been surrounded by other people all day. Don't we owe ourselves something?" Bemused by

all that had happened in this astounding day she let him have it his way, leaving a guiding hand under her elbow as they entered the narrow path through the little larch spinney.

They didn't talk. A companionable silence enfolded them there in the rustling darkness. They emerged into starriness and the path firmed into the mountain stones set by other hands in the long ago, then as they mounted the larger ones that formed the steps to her little porch, fragrance drifted to them on the night breeze. "Oh," she said delightedly, "the stocks have begun to flower. I knew they were in bud, so spicy and redolent."

"Yes, forerunners of summer. It's going to be a memorable summer, Greta, one we'll remember all our lives. All the omens are right for it."

"Oh, what a lovely thing to say, it fills me with expectancy. Like when we were children and Mum and Dad usually took us back to Britain for our holidays. Not that we were at boarding-school – we were always left with Granny and Grandpa Mountford. Mum wouldn't leave us otherwise. She didn't always accompany Dad."

"I'm glad you had your grandparents. Every child should have a place in their memories that spells home. Their own little nooks and corners. And they lived on the edge of the moor, didn't they?"

"They did. There was an outcropping of rock I could see from my window when I put out my light, against the night sky. I loved it. So safe, so secure. I think I loved it best of all when there was thunder and lightning. I feel the same here with that half-split rock the children call Peter-and-Paul on Jagged Ridge. I see it from my bedroom window. I even had a special attachment to the angle of the wall where the chimney stack was."

Suddenly she felt overwhelmed by all this day had brought. He caught a certain faltering in her tone as she said, "Caleb, it's late. We—"

He caught her against him. "I don't care how late it is. We've weathered a lot today, or you have, my gallant love. I was all set to lose my block, you know, furious that that girl

should come here to disturb what peace you've regained, but you stopped me in my tracks the way you took it and I could see in a moment the kind of life you lived. Some of your father's gifts have rubbed off on you. For the first time I felt your two worlds were meeting. Your father would have been proud of you."

She caught her breath with the sweetness of that. As they stepped into the little porch he turned to her and cupped her face with both hands, strong and warm. "We'll just take these next few days as they come. It's not so hectic a time for me. I'll see that it keeps on the level it's been ever since Lilian and I heard that conversation between you from the old quarry. It seemed to transform what was once cruel drama and misunderstanding into a time of pleasant comradeship. So we deserve a few moments of something more than comradeship ourselves!" He kissed her full on the mouth, with his hands still warm against her cheeks. It had nothing of their former kisses. It had everything of kinship and, yes, peace. But behind that, passion too.

To her own surprise she kised him back, drawing herself up. She said lightly, "Goodnight, Caleb," and went inside to sleep dreamlessly, which was exactly what he had hoped and planned for her.

In the chalet, Lilian and Jessica slept sweetly too.

Quite unbelievably the week that followed was great fun. How amazing that what, in the first few minutes of recognizing Virginia's double, when it had seemed unbearable, should have turned out like this.

Caleb commented on it, coming to stand at her side in her porch doorway, one late twilight. The days were lengthening now. "Even that night when we parted here after seeing Lilian and Jessica back to the chalet, while greatly relieved, I was still wishing the week away but now . . ."

"Now . . . ?" she said as he hesitated.

Then as she looked at him, one of her lovely brown eyebrows raised, he said, rather lamely, "Now it seems to

me rather a pity that such harmonious relations can't continue for longer. Two hemispheres meeting, new bonds forged. Oh dear, I'm sounding trite, pompous. My feelings are so mixed I just don't know how to express it. I found myself saying to Lilian yesterday: How about the two of you coming back in a year or two—" He broke off. "That's stupid. We belong to two different worlds. It's not as if they lived in Australia, just across the pond."

"The pond? Oh, you mean the Tasman Sea?"

He went on, "Cost makes it impracticable. But seeing a new relationship develop between you and Jessica, in spite of all, makes it seem a pity. And she goes back to life without her twin."

"Hasn't Jessica told you? She's left her secretarial job to become her aunt's secretary, and it looks as if that means travelling the world with her. We might get the occasional visit to keep their memory green."

"Oh, great! We could tell them they'd be welcome to a chalet any time they wish. Or stay – upon sober reflection, might it be easier for you if, after all, this chapter of your life is closed?"

"I would've thought so once. Now it seems quite easy to take in my stride, but . . . " She turned away a little.

He turned her back, "But what?" His hands were warm on her shoulders, his look keen.

She shook her head. "Sometimes one has second thoughts."

He said, "Shall I tell you what I hoped you'd say?"

"If you think it wise."

"I hoped you'd say: 'But I'll be glad to be on our own again.'"

She was silent.

He said, "Okay. You decreed I should slow the pace and I agreed. I was giving you time to get over what happened to you over there. But you won't have the ordering of that for ever. Nevertheless I don't want that painful time overlapping into this. In some ways I'm glad this happened, oddly enough; Jessica coming here, breathing fire and fury, yet departing in peace; I wanted all that wiped for you, not stirred up again."

She lifted her eyes. They were dead serious. "Caleb, your reaction was so good, it's ceased to matter. Like something that happened in another existence."

His eyes searched hers, "Truly?"

"Yes truly." There didn't seem to be any need to say more. His fingers had come to her chin a moment ago, during that searching. She felt as if their touch still lingered. She turned her head to gaze out across the garden eastward to where the road to Drumlogie made a gap in the rim of the valley. Where they had watched that moonrise. She wrenched her mind back. These were lovely moments too. In no more than seconds twilight had become night. Beyond the silhouette of those two Lombardy poplars on the far fringe of that five-acre paddock across the stream, one star had already bloomed out. She turned to him. "How comforting that star was when I first came here. I felt so far off from all I knew and loved. Of course *you* weren't here then." She didn't know how meaningful that sounded. "Then, I came out here one night. Much colder than this, and it gleamed out. Rather foolish when I knew these were the stars of the Southern Hemisphere but I couldn't help wondering if that was Granny's star. And Grandpa's."

"What do you mean, Gretchen?"

"I told you Dick and I lived with them a lot. Granny had always written poetry. Most of it published in magazines. Grandpa was in the wool trade. He owned a mill but had this great passion for the land. I think that's why I love it here. They just had about five acres. Loosestone walls and black-faced sheep. There was a white picket fence around our garden to keep the stock out, and a little gate. When Grandpa had been dead a few years, Granny wrote a poem. She was always such fun, even after he'd gone, we hadn't realized what a loss it was to her . . . not until we saw it in a magazine under a pen-name she'd used for her more fugitive verses. We hadn't known just why they always made a habit of going to the wicket gate each night for a look at what they called *their* star. The poem revealed that. Oddly enough, it always seemed to shine beside a couple of tall poplars like those. Oh, we always knew they took a little dander before

locking up, but we'd thought it just for a breath of fresh air. They probably needed a respite from two boisterous children. We were no angels."

He laughed. "I can well imagine that. I've often thought you were probably a youngster like Jason, a fair little devil at times, but most disarming."

She felt moved. "You've actually thought about what I was probably like as a child?"

"Yes, why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know. I didn't think people thought like that. Especially men."

In a moment he said, "Have you a copy of that poem? I know you brought scrap-books with you."

"No, it's in Dad's scrapbook. He'd seen it in the magazine first. I came across it once when I was hunting for a poem by Coventry Patmore I wanted to quote in an article. There were things in it that touched me to tears. It was full of our first drawings – though that was my worst subject, and all our school reports. I found he always took one with him. I realized then he must have known nostalgia. That was the price he paid for being one of the mediators of the world. It reconciled me to their absences. But I know the poem by heart. It's just a few lines. I think because she called it: *Our Bright Particular Star* she must've been thinking of Shakespeare's line. She was a great one for Shakespeare. It goes:

'We didn't dream when first we saw that star we loved
the best of all . . . together,
That someday one of us would watch it gleam from
here . . . alone.
That you would be where, window-like, the stars
look down,
While I, my hand upon the picket-gate, look up . . .
So, still it seems to me we watch that self-same star
. . . together.'"

He didn't speak for a moment, then said, "Thank you, Greta, for sharing that with me."

She said, a smile in her voice, "The first time I read it, I suddenly saw them not as Granny and Grandpa, but as people in their own rights. As young, as sweethearts. It's good for you to see your forebears as that, not just in relation to you."

He nodded. "Be very glad for that memory, and pass it on to – to your children. Tell me, have you inherited that gift? Have you ever written poetry?"

She shook her head. "No, but Dad has, though he was a late starter. Didn't know he had it in him till he came to New Zealand and fell in love with Mother."

He said slowly, "You might find it in you yet. I'd like to think so."

Chapter Twelve

Nevertheless two days later, Greta did suffer a pang . . . a very odd sort of pang . . . when she saw Caleb in the jeep, with Jessica beside him, going up the cutting. This was at morning break. Then she saw them turn off, half-way up, towards the Little Acre, as nearly all these remote run-holders called their burial-grounds. Oh no, that was too much, to take her to that special place. The pang struck her again, almost physically. It was unaccustomed in its . . . in its what? Her mind answered that honestly: In its ferocity! How truly stupid. That was the adjective usually applied to jealousy. She shied away from the thought. She'd never been jealous. At least not till now. He had taken Greta there on the anniversary of Alastair's death. He had taken pansies, said his mother had rung from New Plymouth to remind him. "Some for my father's grave too. It's their wedding anniversary the same week."

Greta had felt special because he'd said to her, "I've never taken anyone with me before." Greta had known he felt she belonged here. Why take someone met just a week ago and in *such* circumstances?

When she got the children herded back into the school-room, she found her mind returning to this. Oh, well, perhaps Lilian wanted to bring in a lonely graveyard in some book she would write. But in that case, why not take Lilian too?

Greta was aware that Arabella had repeated a question and came back to reality. "Yes, sorry. What is it, Arabella?" They were writing a piece describing their surroundings. It would be interesting to find out how they would vary. What each one would like, or not like.

"I asked you how you spelt magenta?"

Greta looked at her. "You are supposed to look up spellings for yourselves."

Arabella sounded virtuous: "But I did, and there's No m-a-j-e-n-t-a."

Greta laughed, "We said the other day, didn't we, that spelling is often different from pronunciation. Try m-a-g."

Jason, always one for distractions, said quickly, "What on earth do you want to use that word for?"

Arabella said airily, "I'm describing the colour of that hen-house you painted."

Jason looked outraged. "That's not magenta, it's – it's a – a sort of pink. Like that advert on TV. It's *hot* pink."

Bart muttered, "I'll say! *Very* hot."

Arabella stuck to her guns. "Well, that's what Caleb said and he knows everything. So there!"

The tone in Greta's voice that they all instantly obeyed, whenever they'd gone too far, checked the argument. She added, "Caleb said cerise, and if you're looking that up, it begins with a 'c' not an 's'. Now, I'm setting some separate lessons for this afternoon so all get on unless it's important." All the heads bent over the desks.

As usual she had lunch in her own little kitchen and was just starting to boil an egg when Ursie slipped along, a small oven-proof dish in her hands. "Caleb's having his lunch over at the chalet so this will be wasted if you don't have it. It's best eaten fresh, not kept. It's a vegetable quiche, well, mostly. It's got chopped bacon in too." She went away.

Greta decided it was the most tasteless quiche she'd ever eaten. And while lessons were rarely boring with these youngsters, they were dead flat today. Buck was taking all the children off in the station-wagon, to gather cones for the fires and she begged to be excused. She went out to the donkeys.

Caleb came to her there. "Don't carry on with that too long. Ursie's invited Jessica and Lilian over for dinner."

She looked up from where she was dealing with a particularly stubborn patch of mud on Keziah's flank. "What's new about that? She's asked them over most nights and I thought she was putting on something special tomorrow

night, seeing they'll be going back to Queenstown the next day."

"Their plans are changed. It's tomorrow now. She's decided her first book about New Zealand will be set in Glenorchy. She rang Gideon for some extra gen and he and Annabel have asked them to come and stay for a week. There's a lot of ground to cover up there. They'll go up by steamer, and Gideon wants her to get all the Biblical names they use up there, for land features and people. It'll be very good for Jessica. She's got the chip off her shoulder, and," he grinned, "Lilian is taking her back to Scotland eventually and told me that her bachelor neighbour, a forester, has got Jessica in his sights, if you'll excuse the expression, and she's got an idea Jessica found him rather interesting too."

Greta said, to cover up an overwhelming sense of relief, "Now, stand still, Keziah, or I'll hurt you. I've nearly got it off." Then, the mud gone, she looked up at Caleb and spoke bluntly, words she hadn't meant to utter: "I saw you take Jessica up to the Little Acre this morning."

Something in her tone caught Caleb's attention. He took the curry-comb off her, narrowed his eyes, sent Keziah off on her way with an affectionate slap on the rump, and said, "By Jove, I believe I've done it at last."

"Done *what*?"

He guffawed. "Made you jealous! I've been wanting to see some instance of the green-eyed monster for some time. You never showed a bit over Erica, and you ought to have done."

Greta felt a most unwelcome blush rising. She said shortly, "Well, I could tell you hadn't an atom of feeling left for *her*!"

She got no chance to say anything more for he said disgustedly, "You didn't honestly think I was falling for red hair and blue eyes? You must be mad, you stupid wench. You know *exactly* what my feelings are, *where* they are. I've been waiting with more patience than I knew I possessed, for you to get over what happened months ago at the other side of the world." His voice changed. "Greta, do you know why I took that poor mixed-up girl to Alastair's grave? Because

I wanted her to know that one can carry on, after losing a well-loved sibling. I told her I knew that identical twins have an extremely close bond, but that in the earlier isolation we grew up in, we forged one very close too. Said that now the schoolroom is filled with children, but once there was just Judy, myself and Alastair. That you can bear a shattering loss and recover. She thanked me. *She* didn't read anything into my taking her there, believe me. She said she had seen how it was with me, about you, I mean, and was glad about it. But though it has been, surprisingly, an enjoyable time, I'd like them out of it now, to let *us* get on with our lives.

"No, I'm not saying more than that right now. I'm damned if I'll let our courtship get all mixed up with entertaining them. And believe me, it *is* courtship. It was bad enough Erica trying to throw a spanner in the works, so I won't have anyone else doing it. And when they've been out of our lives long enough to fade in importance, no matter how much you tell me to slow down, I'll make my own pace, but don't try me too far or I'll club you over the head and drag you off to my cave."

She looked at him and found, to her annoyance, a laugh bubbling to her lips. She said exasperatedly, "Oh, you devil, Caleb Armstrong, you devil."

His laughter joined hers. "I don't know why it is," he complained, "but when you call me a devil, I'm practically sure you do love me. Now let's get this grooming stuff back to the stable."

He paused in the doorway and said, "And by the way, if you hear any more of Dexter's asides, take no notice."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought you might have heard him the other day."

"When he said what?"

"Then you probably didn't. He said to the other two and meant me to hear it: 'Did you ever know the boss take so much time off, guys? Not that I blame him with a gorgeous redhead like that around.' I didn't let on I heard but I'd like to have said, 'Not me. I prefer dancing brown eyes and straw-coloured hair, thanks.' Which by the way, is your own description. I'd rather call it honey-coloured with a swirl."

He caught her round the waist, swung her off her feet, landed her back on the ground and kissed her.

She pushed him away. "You're clean mad. We're in full view of everybody, the chalets, the houses, *and* Ursie's at the window!"

"I hope they were all there," he said, shamelessly, and began to walk away. Over his shoulder he said, "It's time you had a shower. Not only do you need cooling down, but you're all over chaff and donkey hairs. This farewell dinner calls for your most beautiful garments. See you soon."

It was the third day after their guests' departure and Greta had a feeling Caleb would press her for an answer, very soon. With the sensitivity that had surprised and delighted her from the start . . . or almost the start . . . she knew he wanted her to have that gap between her old life and the new. She had a great feeling of expectancy. That was what had kept her awake for hours the night before last. Till she had found relief from her racing thoughts at her desk.

She knew now that she loved Caleb as he deserved to be loved. The sort of man she desired to be the father of her children. Oh, dear, whoa, Greta. It wasn't just her love for this sequestered valley, its sense of continuity, its one-hundred-and-thirty-year-old-home with its nooks and crannies. If she had met him in the more academic atmosphere of lecturing in agricultural colleges, she would have followed him from post to post.

Now, this very morning, she realized it was up to her to make the first overture. Surely a woman could guide what must be a responsive mood into one of acceptance? Her pulses raced at the thought. She must pull herself together. It didn't do to be absent-minded in the classroom.

At morning break Ursie came to her. She put some pikelets down on the bench where Greta was making herself a mug of coffee, and said, "I'll have some with you."

Greta was sure she had something on her mind. Finally she said, "Ursie, what is it?"

Ursie let a sigh of relief escape her. "Glad you've given me the chance to say – to say . . ."

"Say what?"

"I'm not one given to to meddling, but I want to ask you . . ."

"I know you're not. Out with it. What's on your mind. Nothing about Caleb, is it?"

"Oh thank goodness you've jumped to it. That means you – well, it's just this. I've not seen him in a mood like this one for years. Withdrawn, Unsmiling. He was like that at times after Alastair died. It's something he cares about deeply. So he can't give it words. So I came to the conclusion the two of you must have quarrelled. He was quite all right this morning, though. Till after breakfast. Years ago when he was like that he'd say he was blue-devilled and ride off hell-for-leather, to get it out of his system and not inflict it on his sister, his parents. *Have* you fallen out over something?"

"We haven't quarrelled, Ursie, in fact I think you could say we're nearer an understanding than we have ever been. I've put the past behind me, but earlier I had to ask him to slow the pace. It was too soon. I was so unsure of myself when Martin let me down and he and Jessica's sister were killed."

Ursie was staring at her. "You're never telling me that her sister was *that* Virginia? And you and Jessica such friends?"

"There was a lot behind that, Ursie. It was a shock when she appeared, and Caleb was marvellous. I can't go into it, at least not now. Especially when you are telling me Caleb wasn't himself this morning. We didn't tell you at the time in case it spoilt your pleasure at enteraining Lilian Moore. I don't think it can be anything to do with me. I haven't seen him this morning."

"I didn't think it could be after what I saw in the stable doorway the night before they went away." She looked slyly at Greta who blushed.

But she laughed and said easily, "I told him he could have picked a less public place. No, I know of no reason. In fact we – er – got a few things ironed out."

Ursie rose. "It'll be time for the children to come in. I'm probably worrying over nothing." She bent over Greta and

kissed her cheek. "You'll make my lad very happy, bless you. Oh, well, he'll be back soon, all the cobwebs blown away, I'm sure. I asked Buck where he'd gone and he said the boss had told him he was off to ride round the Herefords' paddocks, though it puzzled Buck why he needed to. Say nothing when he comes home."

But Caleb didn't come home.

His horse did. Ajax. Riderless, just before lunchtime, trotting up to the homestead fence and whinnying. Obviously uneasy. He was sweating and nervous.

The men examined him for signs of a stumble, for scratches. But there were none. He hadn't been down, but where was Caleb?

This was dangerous country, especially where the steers were, though Buck had said he had no idea why Caleb had needed to look them over. There were deep gullies and water-holes there and miniature cliffs down which a rider, if thrown, could suffer serious, if not fatal, injury. Greta was impressed with the way emergency organisation was instantly set in train. Rescue parties for lost trampers were quite commonplace to these men, and to the women. Buck set off in the jeep, the cellphone with him, ready to call the helicopter service if need be. The others went on horseback. Beyond the shoulder of the first hill on the left from here, they would fan out, to search as much ground as they could cover. Every acre! But then there were so *many* acres.

There was no question of any more lessons for the day. Ursie came to Greta, determination in every inch of her. "I'm off too. I've saddled up. I know where the men are going but there are a few places away from the main tracks, where he and his brother used to go. I feel in the strange mood he was in, he might just have made for them. I want you here in the study, Greta, beside the main phone. This line is the clearest. The other women will keep within hearing of theirs, and Ben at the cookhouse. Caleb is as tough as they come, of course. Odd, though, that he went so suddenly. Dexter came back from Queenstown late last night with the mailbag, but hadn't time to sort it. Caleb got them on to clearing the

nearer culverts. So one moment Caleb was at the desk sorting it, and the next moment he was off." Then Ursie was gone. Greta envied her, but Ursie knew almost every inch of this terrain.

She sent the children off to their respective homes. No need to tell them to be good. Concern had subdued them into well-drilled obedience. The look on little Arabella's face was almost too much for Greta. She took up her own post in the study.

The mailbag was still on the older desk where Caleb always sorted it. It wasn't even properly finished. Some window-envelopes hadn't even been opened. Caleb was usually very meticulous and prompt about dealing with the mail. One or two personal letters had been set aside. She stared down unbelievingly at one, that had already been opened. It was addressed to Mr *Alastair* Armstrong. In a flash she knew what had happened. It was always a shock to get a letter addressed to someone gone from this earth. Almost inevitably in the first few weeks succeeding a bereavement some came, but you didn't expect it after years. So he had gone out to ride it off. Probably wouldn't stop to open gates, would take the fences in his stride, or his mount's stride. It took only some newly created scoured-out place on the other side, due to rain, and you could be thrown. He'd say he was going round the Herefords because he knew none of them had work there today.

That track went on past those paddocks, skirting several valleys, till it curved round behind Jagged Ridge and finally joined the one that led to the plateau. Beyond that was Infinity Hill, beloved of Alastair and named by him. Could there have been anything particularly disturbing in that letter? It had an Australian stamp on it. She didn't hesitate for a moment, she picked the first page up. It started:

'Dear Alastair,

How are you, mate?

Bet it gives you a shock to hear from one of the world's worst letter-writers. I can't imagine you anywhere else but at the Kingdom. By now you may have heard there's to be a re-union next year at Lincoln.

You're bound to have. After all, you weren't a drop-out like me. I don't know how or why they ferreted my present address out. Someone must've known. I'm manager of one of the big stations here. Married into the family. Very happily too, wonderful wife and two sons and a daughter. My wife is coming with me. It'll be great to see you, Alastair. They asked if I had any reminiscences I'd like to submit. You were in most of mine, so I wondered if we might collaborate. Some of our escapades might need editing, though! How about it—'

She didn't need to read any further. This was what had made Caleb fling himself on Ajax . . . but where was he now? She had a ghastly vision of Caleb, face upturned to the sky . . . she knew exactly what she must do. There was no-one else. She must call the head shepherd's wife so they would know where she was.

Jane came over immediately, leaving Rowena to look after Todd. Greta told her with a scarcity of words that revealed the situation immediately. She asked Jane to man that phone. If the men called she was to say she had a hunch he'd gone the long way round to Infinity Hill. Jane didn't waste her breath protesting. She got the first-aid kit out of the bathroom, slipped in the small flask of brandy that was kept there for emergencies, gave her a rugby referee's whistle. Not much good in these distances, but might be of some help, if any of the men called in and decided to make that way. She advised Greta not to saddle up too hastily, make sure the girth was tight, not to go hell-for-leather.

Then she was away, going up towards the Gap, a prayer in her heart. Times like this prayer was instinctive. She came up from the dark side of the valley on to the sunlit plateau. How wonderful it would be to see a figure on that sheep-dotted flat. There wasn't a sign of any movement among the mob. If he'd come this way, from the other track, by now he must be beyond this area, down among those dips and gullies on the rim of the plateau where the drainage from the foothills gashed the edge and the bush – native forest – began. She quickened the pace.

She reached the first gully without any sign. She slowed up here, calling Caleb's name over and over, dread in her heart. It was terrifically steep and rough as the track dropped down, then climbed again, and the bush, especially on the lower side, was dense. Her hunch was still strong. She stopped now and then to listen for an answer to her calling, in case near at hand, a man was lying, unseen and hurt, but hoping, hoping . . .

A clump of Australian gums, huge ones, signalled the beginning of yet another steep drop round a hill whose edge had been bulldozed away to make the track. What lay downhill she'd call a ravine, herself. Dickon began to pick his way, carefully. She'd better let him rest a few moments, then call again. She reined in and into the mountain silence fell a sound she didn't expect to hear: Whistling. *Whistling!* You didn't whistle if you were gravely hurt, and nobody save Caleb whistled 'A hundred pipers an' all, and all'! Round the corner he came striding, hands in pockets, making a steady pace that wouldn't exhaust him over the miles that stretched ahead.

He checked immediately, stood staring at her, then shouted: "Gretchen! By all that's holy, what are *you* doing here?"

She steadied Dickon who was startled, dismounted, looked at Caleb and said accusingly, "I thought you were *dead* . . . or injured, and you're – you're *whistling!*"

He laughed. Said, "Well, I'm alive, and damned glad to see you. It was going to be a long, hot tramp back. It's one helluva walk." Then he shrugged. "Even an old-timer like me can get bucked off, you know. Hey, for God's sake don't let go of the reins, or they'll have all Queenstown searching for us. Tell me, did Ajax get home all right?"

Her voice wobbled. "He did. It was a bad moment when he came home riderless. The men are all out round the steer paddocks, and Ursie seaching some of your favourite places round there. Buck's got the cellphone with him ready to call the rescue helicopter if needed."

He was close to her now, holding the bit firmly. "One of those wretched feral goats leapt down, some way along this

track. Leapt down the cutting there. Ajax stopped dead and the next thing I knew I was sailing over his head, and rolling down the lower side. Not far before I stopped. Had it been a bit further on, it could have mattered. But Ajax hates goats: he can't stand the smell. It's a sort of thing with him. I heard him snort and he must've wheeled round and taken off." He started to laugh, "But did you have to sound cross because I was whistling?"

She bit her lip to control its trembling. "I couldn't help it. I was prepared for the worst and you sounded so *cheerful!*"

He gave one of his guffaws. "It could've been worse. I might have been whistling, "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day . . ."

She continued on indignantly, "I can understand now why when one day Richard and I spent hours on the moor, quite oblivious to time, poor Granny was distraught . . . and when she found us coming along quite happily, with a fish we'd guddled, she spanked us, spanked us hard. And she wouldn't cook our fish. She gave it to the cat! But what damage did you suffer? I've a first-aid kit here and some brandy."

"Oh, I'll have the brandy. I'm hot and thirsty."

"You will not! Not on an empty stomach!"

"You won't be able to do the ministering angel act, I've only got one skinned elbow and a few scratches on my back."

Her eyes filled up and the tears spilled over. He caught her against him. "Darling, I'm a tough high-country man. I'm harder to get rid of than that. Look, sweetheart . . ." he tipped her chin up with his free hand, looked at her narrowly. "I do believe you care. God bless that goat!"

She said, "Oh, you devil! I was going to tell you tonight you needn't slow the pace any more and – *and I thought you might never know.*"

It was wonderful to see his face soften like that. "Oh, girl, I've been waiting for this moment. I knew I had to give you time to get over Martin, and I'm not patient by nature so it's been tough . . . I even wanted us to have our usual late

snowfall so I could be really sure you could take this life when all access was cut off."

She straightened up so her chin slipped free of his fingers, said, very simply, her eyes holding his, "*Take* it? I love it. I had to be sure, you see; I loved your valley so much, long before you came home, I *dared* not make the same mistake twice . . . thinking this was a place of continuity, where I might put down roots at last. I had to be sure, Caleb, *for your sake*. It took Jessica to show me – when I saw you taking her to the Little Acre, I was all burned up with jealousy. Of course I love you, Caleb, I love you, love you, love you."

He came closer, gave a little laugh that was all exultancy, caught her close, but their lips had barely met when she pulled back, saying, "Oh, Caleb, you idiot, now you've let *this* horse go!"

But Dickon had just spied some succulent grass on the verge, and began to crop it. Caleb moved like lightning, caught him again, and said to her, "Some day, I'm sure, a romantically-minded granddaughter of ours is going to ask me how I proposed to her grandmother and I'll have to tell her you called me a devil and an idiot and spoiled our first real kiss. Now, wench, we're going to have to ride that poor animal tandem, so we'd better let him graze a bit first to get his strength up. You'll have to come up in front of me."

"I won't," said Greta, "not in front. You might be more hurt than you know. You might have fallen on your head. You might faint and fall off. I'm getting up behind you to hold you on."

He hooted derisively, "Not the hero rescuing his woman, but an Amazon to the rescue."

What a different journey. The same acres of tussock blowing almost silver in the sun and wind, the same sheep placidly grazing, Dickon plodding along at a much slower pace.

The inevitable question came. "But how did you guess where I was?"

"I was manning the phone at Ursie's orders and saw that

envelope addressed to Alastair and I knew how you must've felt. And where you'd come."

"If you hadn't been in the schoolroom, if it had been last night when Dexter dropped the mailbag off, I'd have come straight to you."

The sweetness of that caught at her throat. From now on she would always be there for his most vulnerable moments. A half-sob escaped her and didn't go unmarked.

As they jogged along they held the oddest conversation. Caleb said, "I shall never forgive you for this, holding me on. The first hour of betrothal should be face to face, murmuring sweet nothings. As it is, it's anything but romantic."

"Isn't it?" asked Greta. "Isn't it? It'll do me. If you only knew how different this is from the gallop over the plateau, calling, calling, listening, listening, with only that sound of uncaring sheep and a lark trilling away up in the sky, just as if you weren't missing!" He chuckled. They jogged on.

Suddenly Caleb said, "Sweetheart, you're crying. You don't need to."

"I do so. But how did you know?"

"Because my back is getting wet and tears are salty. They're stinging my scratches!"

"I don't care. You mightn't have been able to feel that if you – Caleb, I'll just have to sniff, I haven't got a hanky. That's unromantic too, sniffing! I'll kill you if you tell our granddaughter that!"

"You're so self-sufficient as a rule, I like it. Put your hand into my right pocket. There's one there. It's a bit gory. I mopped my elbow up with it. I didn't know that elbows *had* so much blood in them. Another romantic thought. A true hero would be able to produce a freshly ironed handkerchief to mop up his lady-love's tears, I'm sure."

"The bloody one will do me," she started to giggle. "At least if you're bleeding, you've got to be alive." Her hands had been clasped round his not inconsiderable middle, ready to grasp the reins if she felt him sag.

He continued, "And when you've mopped up, lean forward and put your left cheek against my cheek."

"Why my left cheek?"

"Haven't the faintest idea. I'm sure there's some deep-rooted psychological reason for it. So just do it."

She leaned forward, both cheeks glowed. It was immensely comforting. She said, "Well, this has convinced me it wasn't just a desire for a settled life this time. All I wanted was to find you alive and well."

"You could have fooled me. At the time you sounded as if I should have been alive and injured . . . I expect you got all steamed up imagining you bending over my lifeless form, no, my unconscious form and imploring me to open my eyes."

"Oh, Caleb!" One hand left the reins to cover one of hers.

"Much better, my love. By the way, I suppose we'll have to face the lot of them when we get back . . . and I won't be able to help telling them. Oh, Gretchen, you said something about you'd been going to tell me tonight. Why then?"

"Well, first there was seeing you go up the cutting with Jessica and then the night before last . . ." her voice trailed off.

He prompted her, "Yes, the night before last . . . go on."

"Well, it wasn't the night before last really, it was in the early hours of yesterday morning. I – I couldn't sleep for thinking of you. And – and it sort of took me the way it took my father when he fell in love with Mother. You know – you asked me had the family gift for writing cropped up in me? Oh, Caleb, I can't go on telling you this, squashed up together on a saddle that was only meant for one . . . we're both hot and sticky and dirty. Wait till tonight."

"Tell me *now*. We're going to be surrounded by hordes of relieved people once we reach the valley. You got as far as the early hours of yesterday morning . . . do you really mean? . . . you must mean you wrote some lines of verse to me. *Did* you?"

"Yes. When first light came I went over to that little rosewood desk and . . . and got it out of my system."

She sensed the delight in his voice. Then a few minutes later he said, "I believe most poems are written over and over again when they are first composed. Was it like that with you? Because I wouldn't know. I've only ever composed limericks or doggerel for the college newsheet, but *they* took copy after copy. I could recite some of them now because of that. Was it that way with you? . . . Could you?"

She hesitated, then because it was the first thing he had asked of her since she'd admitted her love, she said, "I'll try. I called it: *Certainty*."

He had always loved her voice, the lilt in it, the timbre . . .

"This *must* be love, else why should every bird
Sing sweeter songs than ever sung before?
Why should my heart stand still – or so it seems—
When suddenly your knock sounds on my door?
Why should I think God paints the clouds more brightly
As each day's sunset marks the long day's close?
That dawn distils an even greater fragrance
Deep in the heart of every opening rose?
This *must* be love . . . the ever-lurking laughter
In your dear eyes, your touch, your voice, your smile,
The sense of utter loss when you depart, love,
Beyond my sight and sound a little while.
These things are new to me, I can but say
This must be love."

His voice was glad, a little shaken: "May night speed on, and you can repeat it by that picket gate. Then after hearing that I'll never have to wonder if I caught you on the rebound. That was the only reason I slowed the pace, at your request. You see, Gretchen, I'd never be satisfied with second-best. I'd want an ardour to match my own."

"It will," she said.

* * *

They plodded on till they reached the Gap, with a laugh at the Profile Rocks etched sharply against a cloudless sky. Caleb said, "I'm going to try to manoeuvre Dickon into the right position for Takiroa. Did the youngsters ever tell you what it means? *Taki* sound. *Roa* long? The long-slab-of-rock-that-echoes. It'll be a good a way of letting them know we are safe and sound. This is a tradition that has always been handed down from the first Gretchen's days. She taught all her children to yodel. Darling, hold the reins. I don't think Dickon will be startled, he's quite used to it." He edged Dickon through the gap, judged the distance. They looked down. The various search parties must all have arrived back for consultation. It couldn't have been better. He brought Dickon, a very thankful mount, to a full stop, and she felt Caleb take a deep breath.

Was there ever a more beautiful sound? Takiroa caught it gladly and tossed it back against canyon walls, and from peak to peak, a silver-sweet, happy sound. They saw far below, the white blurs that were the faces of men, women and children they so loved, lifted towards Hatchet's Gap.

Caleb said, "The little hills rejoice on every hand," and they rode down the cutting to their kingdom.

M'Carthy

Essie Summers was born a year to the day and hour her parents left England's Newcastle-on-Tyne for a new life in New Zealand.

At eighteen, her first published poem came out in an Australian magazine, followed by a number of short stories, serials and articles in New Zealand publications. Meanwhile, she met her future husband, the Reverend Bill Flett, who had come out to New Zealand in his teens from Sunderland, a mere twelve miles from her parents' beloved Tyneside. Twenty-seven years later they came to England, where they spent a year in London with their son who was working there, and five years later, with their daughter, living in a Surrey village.

Essie has written over fifty novels, and though now widowed, she is kept busy, when not working on her latest novel, keeping up with her seven grandchildren and small great-granddaughter.